



NEW APPROACHES TO  
BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE



# Alexios I Komnenos in the Balkans, 1081–1095

MAREK MEŠKO

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# New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture

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*To my family*

## PREFACE

Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos is a historical person conceived rather differently by many scholars. Their opinions tend to gravitate toward two major points of view. The former group of historians holds that Alexios Komnenos was an undisputed savior of the crippled Byzantine Empire which in 1081 was tottering on the verge of disintegration because of the fateful defeat at Manzikert in 1071 and the ensuing civil war. The latter group of scholars tends to view this emperor much more critically, and some of them even suggest that because of his rather inefficient way of handling military and political matters, the crisis after the battle of Manzikert lasted for a longer period than if a more capable emperor had reigned over the Empire.

The main goal of this monograph is to describe and analyze the military and also to some extent the political measures of Alexios Komnenos in the Balkans prior to the coming of the First Crusade. In this way it is possible from 1081 onward to discern and to evaluate the emperor's steps and actions during the long-lasting conflicts endangering this very important geographical area, which was rapidly becoming the sole core territory of the Byzantine Empire after the loss of its eastern territories in Anatolia which had played this role from the seventh century until 1071. The present detailed reconstruction focuses on Byzantium's armed forces, whose evolution can be traced thanks to various historical Byzantine and non-Byzantine accounts in the period under review, during which they had to provide safety and protection to the Byzantine Balkans against the onslaught of the Normans, the Pechenegs, and the Kumans. By this it is also possible to furnish substantial support for the view of Alexios

Komnenos as a capable and strong ruler and resourceful military commander who in spite of his hard-fought successes against the Normans in 1085, against the Pechenegs in 1091, and eventually against the Kumans in 1095 was during the whole period under concern finally not in a position to initiate and organize a full-scale Byzantine *Reconquista* of the lost territories in the East prior to 1095.

Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

Marek Meško



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the outcome of my more-than-a-decade long endeavor. It has been a very long time (with sporadic breaks, though) and a lot of significant changes have occurred in my personal and professional life.

The list of people who have inspired me in one way or another and to whom I am indebted for helping me process this great topic over the years has grown immensely long. First and foremost, however, I intend to express my gratitude to the late Professor Alexander Avenarius. Without him, and his initial proposal of the possible direction of my research, this work would never have come into existence. My great thanks, of course, also go to all the researchers in the field of History and Byzantine studies I have met and with whom I have had the opportunity to talk during my scholarship stays in Greece, France, Austria, the United States, and Turkey. Professor Theodoros Korres, Professor Alkmini Stauridou-Zafraka, Dr Taxiarchis Koliás, Professor Jean-Claude Cheynet, Dr Constantin Zuckermann, Professor John Haldon, Professor Johannes Koder, Professor Werner Seibt, Professor Klaus Belke, Professor Renata Holod, and many others kindly devoted their time to answering my curious questions and encouraged me to look at some issues from different perspectives. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the library staff of all the scientific institutions I have visited during these years and also several colleagues in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, especially doc. Mgr. Martin Hurbanič, PhD, Mgr. et Mgr. Vratislav Zervan, PhD, prof. PhDr Martin Hetényi, PhD, prof. PhDr Peter Ivanič, PhD, and doc. Mgr. et Mgr. Markéta Kulhánková, PhD, for their useful and kind support. The English version of this book would not be appearing without the tremendous amount of

help of my current home institution—the University of Hradec Králové and doc. PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, PhD. If there is anyone whom I have mistakenly not named here, it is only because the list of people who have supported me in any way in my efforts is indeed very long and my memory of names is poor. Last, but by no means least (as she holds the first place in my mind) I would like to thank my dear wife Jana, who has patiently endured my changeable moods throughout the period of working on this monograph, which has taken considerably longer than originally expected.

Thank you.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Actes de Lavra</i>	Lemerle, Paul – Guillou, André – Svoronos, Nicolas – Papachryssanthou, Denise. <i>Actes de Lavra. Première partie: des origines à 1204</i> . Édition diplomatique. Texte. Archives de l’Athos V. Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1970.
<i>Actes de Vatopédi</i>	Bompaire, Jacques – Lefort, Jacques – Kravari, Vassiliki – Giros, Christophe. <i>Actes de Vatopédi I. Des origines à 1329</i> . Édition diplomatique. Texte. Archives de l’Athos XXI. Paris: P. Lethielleux, 2001.
AEMAc	<i>Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi</i>
AHR	<i>The American Historical Review</i>
<i>Alexias</i>	Kommene, Anna. <i>Annae Comnenae Alexias</i> . Edited by Diether R. Reinsch and Athanasios Kambylis. CFHB. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001.
Attaleiates	Attaleiates, Michael. <i>Historia in Michaelis Attaliothe Historia</i> . Edited by Immanuel Bekker. CSHB. Bonn: Weber, 1853.
BA	Βυζαντινός Δόμος
BB	Византийский Временик
Bernold	Bernold. <i>Bernoldi chronicon</i> . MGH SS, V. Leipzig 1926.
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
Bryennios	Bryennios, Nikeforos. <i>Hylé historias in Nicephori Bryenii Historiarum libri quattuor</i> . Edited and translated by Paul Gautier. CFHB. Brussels: Byzantion, 1975.
BSI	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>

CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiæ Byzantinæ
Choniates	Choniates, Nicetas. <i>Historia in Niceta Choniata Historia</i> . Editio emedatior et copiosior, consilio B. G. Niebuhrii. CSHB. Bonn: Weber, 1835.
<i>Chronicon pictum</i>	Domanovszky, Alexander. "Chronici hungarici compositio sæculi XIV." In SRH, vol. 1, edited by E. Szentpetery. Budapest: Academia Litter. Hungarica, 1937.
CSFB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiæ Byzantinæ
Dandolo	Dandolo, Andrea. <i>Venetorum ducis chronicon Venetum</i> . Edited by L. A. Muratori. RISS XII. Milan 1728, 13–524.
Diaconus	Diaconus, Petrus. <i>Leonis Marsicani et Petri Diaconi chronica Monasterii Casinensis</i> . Edited by J. P. Migne, 439–978. PL, vol. 173. Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1844–1864.
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
ΕΕΒΣ	Ἐπετηρὶς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EO	<i>Echos d'Orient</i>
Ephraemus	Ephraemus. <i>Chronografia: Κείμενο – μετάφραση – σχόλια</i> Οδ. Λαμπίδη. Τόμος Α'. Athens: Kétron ekdóseos ellínon syngrafeón, 1984.
<i>Gesta</i>	Guillaume De Pouille. <i>La geste de Robert Guiscard</i> . Edited and translated by Marguerite Mathieu, preface by Henri Grégoire. Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, 1961.
Glykas	Glykas, Michael. Τοῦ κυροῦ Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Γλυκὰ βίβλος χρονικὴ in <i>Michélis Glykæ Annales</i> . Edited by I. Bekker. CSHB. Bonn: Weber, 1836.
<i>Historia Sicula</i>	Anonymus Vaticanus. <i>Historia Sicula ab ingressu Normannorum in Apuliam usque ad annum 1282</i> . Edited by L. A. Muratori, 745–780. RISS VIII. Milano, 1726.
HUS	<i>Harvard Ukrainian Studies</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
Kekaumenos	Kekaumenos. <i>Strategikon</i> in <i>Κεκαυμένος, Στρατηγικόν</i> . Translated by Dimitris Tsougarakis. Athens: Agrostis, 1996.
Leon o Sofos, <i>Taktika</i>	Leon o Sofos. <i>Αυτοκράτορος Λέοντος Τακτικά</i> . Τόμος Α'.

- Μετάφρασις – σχόλια: Κωνσταντίνος Ποταμιάνος.  
Τελική επεξεργασία κειμένου και γενική  
επιμέλεια έργου:  
Δημήτρα Αθανασοπούλου. Athens: Eléftheri sképsis,  
2001
- Lupus Protospatharius Lupus Protospatharius. *Breve chronicon*. Edited  
by L. A. Muratori, 37–49. RISS V. Milano, 1724.
- Malaterra Malaterra, Gaufredo. *De rebus gestis Rogerii  
Calabriae et  
Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*.  
Edited by L. A. Muratori, 549–602. RISS  
V. Milano, 1724.
- Matthew of Edessa Dostourian, Ara E. *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*.  
New Brunswick, NJ, 1972.
- MGH SS Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptoros  
МИА СССР Материалу и исследования по археологум СССР  
Nestor Nestor. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian*.  
Edited and translated by Samuel Hazard Cross and  
Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. Cambridge, MA:  
Medieval Academy of America, 1953.
- ODB *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Edited by  
Alexander P. Kazhdan. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford  
University Press, 1991.
- PL Patrologia Latina
- Psellos, vol. I Psellos, Michael. *Michael Psellos: Chronographie, ou  
Histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (967-1077)*. Tome  
I. Text établi et traduit par Émile Renauld docteur des  
lettres. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1926.
- Psellos, vol. II Psellos, Michael. *Michael Psellos: Chronographie, ou  
Histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (967-1077)*. Tome  
II. Text établi et traduit par Émile Renauld docteur des  
lettres.  
Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928.
- REB *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*
- RESEE *Revue des Etudes Sud-est Européennes*
- RISS Rerum Italicarum Scriptoros
- Romualdus Romualdus Salernitanus. *Chronicon Romualdi II.  
archiepiscopi Salernitani*. Edited by L. A.  
Muratori, 8–244. RISS VII. Milano, 1725.
- Saxo Saxo Grammaticus. *Annalista Saxo*. MHG SS,  
VI. Leipzig, 1926.
- SBS *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*

SK	<i>Seminarium Kondakovianum</i>
Skylitzes	Skylitzes, Ioannes. <i>Synopsis Historion</i> in <i>Ioannis Scylitza Synopsis historiarum</i> . Edited by Ioannes Thurn. CFHB. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1979.
Skylitzes, <i>Synecheia</i>	Skylitzes, Ioannes. <i>Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτση χρονογραφίας συνέχεια</i> . Edited by Eudoxos Th. Tsolakés. Thessalonica: Etería Makedonikón Spoudón, 1968.
SRH	Scriptores rerum hungaricarum
TIB	Tabula Imperii Byzantini
TM	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>
Villehardouin	Geoffroi de Villehardouin. <i>La conquête de Constantinople</i> . Edited and translated by Edmond Faral. Vol. II. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961.
Zonaras	Zonaras, Ioannes. <i>Epitomé historiôn</i> in <i>Ioannis Zonaræ Epitome Historiarum</i> . Libri XVIII, CSHB. Ex recensione Mauricii Pinderi, Tomus III. Bonn 1897.
ZRVI	<i>Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta</i>
ЖМНП	<i>Журнал Министерства народного просвѣщенія</i>





## Introduction

ἃ γῆ παρεκτείνοντο δυσμῶν ἡλίου,  
ἦν ἡ Σκυθῶν ἔβλαπτε μυριαρχία,  
καὶ νοῦς Ἴταλὸς ὁ θρασὺς δι'ἀσπίδα,  
καὶ γῆ πρὸς ἀγῶαῖς κειμένη τοῦ φωσφόρου,  
καὶ πρὸς θαλάσση Περσικῶν ὄπλων βία, ...  
Alexios Komnenos, *Mousai*<sup>1</sup>

Presumed there are “grand” themes in the study of the Byzantine history, one of them would undoubtedly be the crisis of the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century and its subsequent rapid decline after the infamous battle of Manzikert in 1071. Both of these topics have drawn the attention of a number of prominent researchers worldwide, but indeed the first major interest in them was triggered by Paul Lemerle, a distinguished French Byzantologist who examined eleventh-century Byzantium extensively in the 1970s. In his five groundbreaking studies, published in the collection *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin*, he strived to identify the fundamental causes of the long eleventh-century crisis. Simultaneously, he outlined the processes that definitely changed Byzantium and which, in

<sup>1</sup> Paul Mass, “Die Musen des Kaisers Alexios I,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 22 (1913): 356.

retrospect, proved to be irreversible.<sup>2</sup> The interest raised by Lemerle continues with undiminished intensity to this day and has generated a large volume of published works and specialized studies examining this era from various points of view—political, social, economic, military, and cultural.<sup>3</sup> This boom has resulted in remarkable progress in some areas of research. For example, in the study of the Byzantine economy and the economic aspects of the eleventh-century crisis,<sup>4</sup> its impact on various important aspects of administration, and the overall organization of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>5</sup> There has also been a thorough and exhaustive examination of the political and military collapse of the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor<sup>6</sup> or the analysis of gradual changes in individual Byzantine provinces.<sup>7</sup> However, despite the development of scholarly knowledge, the

<sup>2</sup> Paul Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977). In this text, Lemerle responded to older views of eleventh-century Byzantium presented a decade earlier by Ostrogorsky. See Georgije Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1963), 262–290; see also Michael Angold, “Belle époque or crisis? (1025–1118)” *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c.500–1492*, ed. by Jonathan Shephard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 584–585.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Vasiliki Vlysidou, ed. *Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση (ς) Το Βυζάντιο τον 11<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα (1025–1081)* (Athens: Ethnikó Ídryma Erevnón, 2003) or the latest Marc D. Lauxtermann and Mark Whittow (eds.), *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between – Papers from the 45th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, Oxford, 24–6 March 2012* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Cécile Morrisson, “La dévaluation de la monnaie byzantine au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle: essai d’interprétation,” *TM* 6 (1976): 3–47; Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Oikonomides, “L’évolution de l’organisation administrative de l’empire byzantine au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle (1025–1118),” *Travaux et mémoires* 6 (1976): 125–152; Jean-Claude Cheynet, “Dévaluation des dignités et dévaluation monétaire dans la seconde moitié du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Byzantion* 53 (1983): 453–477.

<sup>6</sup> Spýros Vryónis, Jr., *Η παρακμή του μεσαιωνικού ελληνισμού στη Μικρά Ασία και η διαδικασία του εξισλαμισμού (11ος ειως 15ος αιώνας)* (Athens: Morphotikó Ídryma Ethnikís Trapézis, 1996); Geórgios A. Leveniótis, *Η πολιτική κατάρρευση του Βυζαντίου στην Ανατολή: Το ανατολικό σύνορο και η κεντρική Μικρά Ασία κατά το Β΄ ήμισυ του 11<sup>ου</sup> αι. Τόμος Α΄, Β΄* (Thessalonica: Kéntro Vyzantinón Erevnón, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Christos A. Kyriazópoulos, *Η Θράκη κατά τους 10<sup>ο</sup> – 12<sup>ο</sup> αιώνες. Συμβουλή στη μελέτη της πολιτικής, διοικητικής και εκκλησιαστικής εξέλιξης* (Thessalonica, 2000); Bojana Krsmanović, *The Byzantine Province in Change (On the Threshold between the 10th and the 11th Century)* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute for Byzantine Studies, 2008).

fundamental questions already asked by Lemerle continue to be raised and provoke further debate among researchers.

Therefore, it is natural that one of them shall run through the entire text of this monograph like the proverbial red thread. It is a question related to the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who stood at the head of the Byzantine Empire between 1081 and 1118. Alexios Komnenos became the supreme ruler of the *Rhomaioi*, thanks to a military coup in 1081, ten years after the disastrous battle of Manzikert. This emperor can be said, without exaggeration, to have devoted virtually his entire adult life to correcting the negative consequences of this great Byzantine defeat. Most scholars tend to see Alexios Komnenos almost as the miraculous savior of the Byzantine Empire, who ascended to the historical scene as a *deus ex machina* to lead the crisis-torn state out of the abyss and steer it into a new era of political stability and prosperity.<sup>8</sup> The celebratory historical work on Alexios Komnenos written about half a century after his death by his daughter Anna Komnene, the *Alexiad*, holds the primary merit for the emergence of this laudatory image.<sup>9</sup> However, there are also less favorable accounts of this emperor, such as the historical work *Epitomé historión* by Ioannes Zonaras,<sup>10</sup> proving the well-known axiom that there are two sides to every coin. Following Zonaras' footsteps, there are scholars who perceive Alexios Komnenos from a revisionist point of view and subject his actions to both direct and indirect criticism. For example, following this line of reasoning Lemerle argues that it was not Alexios Komnenos who was the true savior of Byzantium, but eunuch

<sup>8</sup> Such a conclusion can be drawn on the basis of traditional discourse established in the older European but especially in the Greek Byzantine historiography. For an exhaustive overview of positive (as well as negative) views of Alexios Komnenos (and other members of the Komnenoi family) in European historical texts since the end of the seventeenth century, see Alexander P. Kazhdan, "Загадка Комнинов (Опыт историографии)," *ВВ* 25 (1964): 54ff. See also Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte*, 302–303; Bohumila Zástěrová, et al., *Dějiny Byzance* (Prague: Academia, 1996), 251; Aikaterína Christofilopoulou, *Βυζαντινή ιστορία Β' 2 867–1081* (Thessalonica, 1997), 260; Ioannes E. Karagiannópoulos, *Το βυζαντινό κράτος* (Thessalonica: Ekdoseis Vantias, 2001), 211; Hélène Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer: la marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 175–225, esp. 177.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Komnene, *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. by Diether R. Reinsch and Athanasios Kamybilis, CFHB (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomé historión* in *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome Historiarum*, libri XVIII, CSHB. Ex recensione Mauricii Pinderi, Tomus III. Bonn 1897.

Nikeforitzes—the “last reformer” and omnipotent politician and administrator at the court of the emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078).<sup>11</sup>

In view of the above, it is clear that a thorough and comprehensive assessment of Alexios Komnenos’ personality and his concrete impact on the historical development of the Byzantine Empire is very complex and beyond the grasp of any researcher. In fact, a large number of events connected to the states neighboring with Byzantium intersected in his person and in the period in which he found himself at the helm of the Byzantine state. As the emperor of the *Rhomaioi*, Alexios Komnenos maintained active contacts with various Muslim rulers in the Middle East; he established friendly relationships with Seljuk sultans as far away as in distant Khorasan and engaged with their emirs and governors in Asia Minor. Furthermore, he cultivated links with the Fatimid caliphate, the Pechenegs, the Kumans, and the Kievan Rus’. In Europe, his letters and envoys reached almost all the important rulers of his time—he communicated on a regular basis with the papal curia, as well as with the Roman-German emperor, and he maintained long-term friendly relations with the Flemish dukes or the venerable abbots of the Monte Cassino monastery. Various exiles and emigrants from all over the Western Europe found refuge at the imperial court in Constantinople. The most famous among them were certainly the Anglo-Saxons, who were leaving England *en masse* during this period, fleeing the consolidation of the Norman domination established as a result of the 1066 battle of Hastings.<sup>12</sup> As we will see later, it is not by chance that during the reign of this emperor the First Crusade took place, which, in its consequences, fundamentally redefined the relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Latin West. Therefore, the examination of characteristics of Alexios Komnenos’ reign is of great importance for numerous researchers and, by its very significance, goes far beyond the field of Byzantine studies.

The first researcher to devote considerable attention to the reign of Alexios I Komnenos was French historian Ferdinand Chalandon in his

<sup>11</sup> Paul Lemerle, “Byzance au tournant de son destin (1025–1118),” *Cinq études*, 252, 300. For more details on Nikeforitzes and his career, see text below.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Shephard, “The English and Byzantium: A Study of their Role in the Byzantine Army in the Later Eleventh Century,” *Traditio* 29 (1973): 53–92; Krijnie Ciggaar, “L’émigration anglaise à Byzance après 1066. Un nouveau texte en latin sur les Varangues à Constantinople,” *REB* 32 (1974): 301–342; Constance Head, “Alexios Komnenos and the English,” *Byzantion* 47 (1977): 186–198.

work entitled *Essai sur le règne d'Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène* published at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> His views were accepted almost without challenge until the 1970s and 1980s. Recently, however, a number of serious problems have come to the foreground because of the shifting focus of interest compared to mainly positivistic perception by Chalandon. The most significant attempt to summarize this new development concerning Alexios Komnenos is a collective monograph from the 1989 Byzantine conference entitled *Alexios I Komnenos—Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium*, edited by Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe.<sup>14</sup> One of the most recent works demonstrating the continued interest of scholars in Alexios Komnenos and his era is the rather popular publication *Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène* composed by the renowned French scholar Elisabeth Malamut.<sup>15</sup> In spite of all this scholarly interest devoted to the founder of the Komnenian imperial dynasty, many questions remain unanswered. For instance, was Alexios Komnenos really the rescuer of the Byzantine Empire, a man who corrected the mistakes of his incompetent predecessors, as Anna Komnene induces us to believe, or, on the contrary, was he an unscrupulous power-hungry politician, who at the right moment ascended to the imperial throne only to reap the achievements of his now underrated predecessors, and who, with his yet another military coup, delayed the end of the political and military crisis in the Byzantine Empire after the battle of Manzikert for at least another decade or two? What is more, was Alexios Komnenos responsible for the definite loss of Asia Minor and, if so, to what extent?<sup>16</sup> Was he really incapable to conquer Asia

<sup>13</sup>Ferdinand Chalandon, *Essai sur le règne d'Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène (1081–1118)* (Paris: A. Picard, 1900). Although written more than a century ago, Chalandon's monograph has not lost its scientific value until nowadays.

<sup>14</sup>Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe, eds., *Alexios I Komnenos – Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989* (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996). Mullett also addressed the issue of Alexios Komnenos' reign in her later texts, see Mullett, "Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal," *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium 4th–13th Centuries – Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews, March 1992*, ed. by Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 259–267.

<sup>15</sup>Elisabeth Malamut, *Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène* (Paris: Ellipses, 2007).

<sup>16</sup>This question has already been raised and addressed in the collection mentioned above (see note 14) and has come to the foreground again, thanks to Peter Frankopan. See, for example, Peter Frankopan, "The Fall of Nicaea and the Towns of Western Asia Minor to the Turks in the later 11th Century: The Curious Case of Nikephoros Melissenos," *Byzantion* 76 (2006): 153–184.

Minor in its original territorial extent, or did he intentionally leave much of the eastern provinces in the hands of the Seljuks?<sup>17</sup> Finally, could this Byzantine emperor have organized a major military expedition to recapture the lost territories in the East before 1095, and did he sincerely intend to do so?<sup>18</sup>

Since almost three decades have passed since the publication of the Belfast collection, I deem it necessary to re-examine some of the questions and topics discussed on its pages. However, it should be noted that even in the present monograph and in spite of best efforts, it will be virtually impossible to provide a definitive answer. Therefore, I decided to take an indirect approach that is highly selective in many ways and, as a result, subject to certain limitations. First of all, only some aspects of Alexios Komnenos' reign are analyzed here, especially the military and political ones.<sup>19</sup> This makes perfect sense, bearing in mind that Alexios Komnenos came to power as a successful military commander who had already demonstrated his political and military qualities prior to his rise to the imperial throne.<sup>20</sup> Alexios Komnenos had to deal with numerous and urgent

<sup>17</sup> Byzantine studies also have their own “conspiracy theories.” One of them concerns Alexios Komnenos, who, according to this line of thought, was not in too much hurry to regain Asia Minor after ascending to the imperial throne in 1081 because it would only increase the power of the strong aristocratic families from the eastern provinces who did not support him. See, for example, Frankopan, “The Fall of Nicaea,” 180, and Frankopan, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 84. Other authors do not blame Alexios Komnenos directly but critically note that the imperial dynasty of the Komnenoi indeed had a real opportunity to crush the Seljuks, yet eventually failed to do so. See Mark C. Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204–1453* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 349; John W. Birkenmeier, *The Development of the Komnenian Army 1081–1180* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 143–144.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoirs et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Byzantina Sorbonensia 9 (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 1996), 367–369.

<sup>19</sup> This approach was chosen despite a claim of the leading military historian of the European Middle Ages, Bernard S. Bachrach, saying that military history has recently been perceived almost with contempt by many medievalists. See Bachrach, *Charlemagne's Early Campaigns (768–777)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 84. Fortunately, the research of the Byzantine military history during the eleventh-century crisis, as well as in the following period of the Komnenoi dynasty, has gone through a period of unexpected boom in recent decades. Of the many authors who have contributed to this expansion, let me name John Haldon, John W. Birkenmeier, and Jean-Claude Cheynet. Without research of these authors, writing a monograph on this subject would be very difficult, if impossible. See, for example, John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London: Routledge, 1999); Birkenmeier, *Army*; Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*.

<sup>20</sup> See text below.

problems along both the political and military lines for most of the first half of his rule. Immediately after his ascension on 1 April 1081, he had to protect his realm against the ambitions of Robert Guiscard and his Normans. Simultaneously, another serious threat posed by the nomadic Pechenegs was building up in the north of the Balkans, which Alexios Komnenos could only begin to deal with seriously once the war against the Normans was over in July 1085. The conflict with the Pechenegs subsequently kept him occupied until the spring of 1091. Even after the victorious end to this exhausting warfare, Alexios Komnenos had to continue to pay close attention to the Balkan provinces and gradually between 1093 and 1094 to deal with the inroads of the Serbs and with the incursion of another group of nomadic peoples of the steppe—the Kumans. These key conflicts (apart from campaigns against the Serbs who did not represent a significant military threat)<sup>21</sup> are described and analyzed in detail in the following chapters.<sup>22</sup> In conclusion, based on my findings and hypotheses I will endeavor to provide a short but balanced assessment of Alexios Komnenos as the emperor and supreme military commander.<sup>23</sup>

The second limitation is of chronological nature, as it is not possible to analyze in detail the entire, relatively long reign of this emperor within the frame of this monograph. Given that the First Crusade radically changed the international status of Byzantium after 1095, it seems the most fitting to deal with Alexios Komnenos' rule only until this crucial event, that is to focus on the period between 1081 and 1095. In other words, the scope of

<sup>21</sup> Even though I do not examine the military intervention against the Serbs directly (partly so as to respect a certain extent of this work), I do not shy away from commenting and mentioning the events in connection with Serbian states and their rulers when they become important to my narrative. See text below.

<sup>22</sup> The current research of main military conflicts during Alexios Komnenos' reign is very uneven. For example, the war against the Normans between 1081 and 1085 is studied and discussed in great detail (although not all its phases are described equally), with several stimulating partial studies on this subject published recently. See Martin Konečný, "Priebeh vojny Normanov s Byzanciou v rokoch 1081–1085," *Konštantínove listy* 4 (2011): 54–76. Worse still is the Byzantine-Pecheneg conflict, and the least attention has been paid to the Kuman invasion of the Balkans in 1095, because this event is already overshadowed by the little later developments of the First Crusade. The two latter conflicts have been more or less analyzed only in the local modern historical research in the Balkans (in Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece). For specific references to secondary literature, see text below in the relevant chapters of this monograph.

<sup>23</sup> Careful evaluation of Alexios I Komnenos as the military commander was proposed by Margaret Mullett in the 1990s, see Mullett, "Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal," 260.

this monograph is based on the premise that the First Crusade altered the geopolitical position of the Byzantine Empire to such an extent that the negative effects of the battle of Manzikert gradually dissipated. During the second half of his reign, Alexios Komnenos, as well as his successors John II (1118–1143) and Manuel I (1143–1180), had to tackle strategic and political problems of different nature, although from time to time they attempted to reassert imperial authority over all previously lost territories in Asia Minor. At the same time, within this relatively narrowly time-defined period, I shall try, in the relevant sub-chapters, to resolve several complex chronological issues and uncertainties that have persisted in the field of Byzantine studies until nowadays.

The last significant limitation is geographical. Although my ultimate goal is to throw some light on Alexios Komnenos' policies toward Asia Minor (Byzantine East—*Anatolē*), paradoxically, on the pages of this monograph I focus on the Byzantine territories located in the Balkans (Byzantine West—*Dysis*) because, with some exceptions, the territories in Asia Minor had already been under the control of the Seljuk Turks when Alexios Komnenos ascended to the throne.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it was only reasonable that Alexios Komnenos (or the Byzantine elites in the capital) needed first to attempt to consolidate their rule in the Balkans before he was in the position to initiate the reconquest of Asia Minor and thus counter the effects of the battle of Manzikert. This limitation is based not only on my lack of knowledge of Oriental languages (Arabic, Turkish, and Persian), which, in my opinion, is necessary for the detailed research of this topic, but also because of the planned scope of this study. Therefore, where this text refers to events related to Asia Minor and Byzantine-Seljuk relations, I rely heavily on the already existing secondary literature written by renowned orientalist and historians.<sup>25</sup>

As a consequence, my main focus is Alexios Komnenos and his activities during the first fifteen years of his reign, that is, between 1081 and 1095. In particular, I discuss his military and political actions aimed at protecting and safekeeping the remaining Byzantine territories in the Balkans and try to identify the measures he adopted in order to maintain combat

<sup>24</sup> See text below.

<sup>25</sup> Mainly the publications of the French orientalist Claude Cahen. See Cahen, "La diplomatie orientale de Byzance face à la pousée seldjukide," *Byzantion* 35 (1965): 10–15; Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey: The Seljukid Sultanate of Rūm: Eleventh to Fourteenth Century* (New York: Longman, 2001). For further literature, see text below.



capabilities of the Byzantine army and navy, the two main components that allowed Alexios Komnenos to implement his policies. Through a detailed description of military campaigning and important events over a limited period of time, I will attempt to answer some of the fundamental questions raised above. For instance, what's the overall assessment of Alexios Komnenos as a military commander? Was he from the early years of his rule in a position to fend off hostile attacks on the Byzantine Balkans, but also to consider the possibility of an offensive in Asia Minor? In addition, I also try to indirectly assess the value of the *Alexiad*, the historical work of his daughter Anna Komnene. By revisiting the text, I will try to understand whether it is indeed a purely celebratory work full of uncritical admiration of a daughter to her father, or a reliable historical source, that more or less accurately presents the actions and motives of one of the most extraordinary Byzantine emperors.



## Army and Navy in Eleventh-Century Byzantium

The true pillars of Alexios I Komnenos' reign were represented by the armed forces of the Byzantine Empire—the army and the navy. Without exaggeration, it can be stated that no act of this emperor would have been possible without military support. As apparent from the *Alexiad*, it was due to the backing of the army that he was able to win the imperial throne and as the emperor spent almost the entire period of his reign on military expeditions.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is essential to map the development of the Byzantine army and navy during the eleventh century and determine what military forces were at Alexios Komnenos' disposal in 1081. This short overview is also necessary because complex and irreversible transformation was taking place within the imperial armed forces at the time, which in many respects creates sharp distinctions between the Byzantine army and navy under the Komnenian dynasty as compared to that under the Makedonian dynasty. Until nowadays, researchers in Byzantine studies have not defined the extent of these changes or the degree of continuity or discontinuity of the development of the Byzantine army and navy in

<sup>1</sup>The almost exclusively military content of the *Alexiad* is more than telling. Descriptions of wars and battles clearly outweigh the account of events of a non-military nature, making up more than half of the total text. See James Howard-Johnston, “Anna Komnene and the *Alexiad*,” *Alexios I Komnenos Papers*, 273; see also Birkenmeier, *Army*, 6.

satisfactory detail.<sup>2</sup> As a result of somber images full of decay and failure connected with military operations since 1040s depicted in the Byzantine written sources of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries,<sup>3</sup> these changes are now mostly perceived in negative terms.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, early eleventh-century Byzantine sources tend to depict the Byzantine army as a massive and virtually invincible force headed by the emperor-general *par excellence* Basileios II Boulgaroktonos (976–1025), who was able to cause havoc in the ranks of his enemies just by rumors of his arrival at the battlefield.<sup>5</sup> Prior to Alexios Komnenos' coup in 1081, we are presented with an utterly disparate and mostly gloomy image of a numerically weak army dependent heavily on mercenary troops, which, without a tangible result, tried to stop the simultaneous onslaughts of the Normans, the Pechenegs, and the Kumans in the Balkans, and the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor.<sup>6</sup> Descriptions of the Byzantine fleet are as dreary as those of the land forces. According to Anna Komnene, her father had to rebuild the Byzantine navy practically from scratch and plunge into this work of laborious renewal from the very onset of his rule.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup>There are several inspiring works dealing with the development of the Byzantine army during the eleventh century. For example, see Jean-Claude Cheynet, “La politique militaire byzantine de Basile II à Alexis Comnène,” *ZRVI* 29–30 (1991): 61–73; John Haldon, “Approaches to an Alternative Military History of the Period ca. 1025–1071,” *Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση (ς): Το Βυζάντιο τον 11ο αιώνα (1025–1081)*, ed. by Vasiliki Vlysidou (Athens: Ethnikó Ídryma Erevnón, 2003), 48–49, 61–62. For the development of the Byzantine navy, see Georgios Theotokis, *The Norman Campaigns in the Balkans 1081–1108* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 166.

<sup>3</sup>For an overview of negative perspectives, see Dimítris Tsoungarákis, “Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση και η οπτική των συγχρόνων: μία αναγωγή των μαρτυριών,” *Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση (ς)*, 275–290.

<sup>4</sup>Haldon warns against such uncritical approach to information contained in the period Byzantine sources. Haldon, “Approaches,” 71–72.

<sup>5</sup>A typical example is the siege of Aleppo (now Halab, Syria) by the Egyptian Fatimids in 994/995. The Fatimids took advantage of the fact that Basileios II in person participated in an expedition against the Bulgarians at the time. However, as soon as the Fatimids learned that the emperor was about to rapidly move the troops to Syria, the siege immediately ended and the Fatimids retreated. See Thierry Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination Fatimide (969–1076)*, vol. I (Damascus: Institute francais de Damas, 1986), 199–201.

<sup>6</sup>For example, the emperor Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067) had to face the invasion of the Uzes in 1064/1065 with only a small detachment of 150 mercenaries. See Ioannes Skylitzes, *Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτση χρονογραφίας συνέχεια*, ed. by Eudoxos Tsolakés (Thessalonica: Etería Makedonikón Spoudón, 1968), 115. This distinctive feature of the Byzantine historical narration was noticed by Cheynet, see Cheynet, “Politique,” 73.

<sup>7</sup>*Alexias*, III. 9.1. (p. 110). See also John H. Pryor and Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, eds. *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΟΝ: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 87.

## 2.1 BYZANTINE ARMY

### 2.1.1 *Development of the Byzantine Army in the Eleventh Century*

The traditional interpretation of historical works of Michael Psellos,<sup>8</sup> Michael Attaleiates,<sup>9</sup> and Ioannes Skylitzes<sup>10</sup> sees the cause of the decline of the military power of the Byzantine Empire during the eleventh century in the long-term neglect of units of semi-professional provincial militia (the so-called *themata*). The backbone of this thematic army was represented by soldiers enlisted from among free landowners who received land grants from the state (*stratiōtika ktēmata*) in return for military service. Traditionally, two facts are cited as the main reason for this decline—first, the military land grants became gradually part of land domains of great landowners (feudalization process), making their holders start losing their status of free landowners. As a result, they were no longer subject to military duty, so the number of thematic soldiers decreased. Second, thanks to the extensive reform work of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055),<sup>11</sup> there was a possibility to transfer the direct military service into a cash payment (*strateia*), which gradually also contributed to further reduction in the number of soldiers serving in the units of the *themata*. In an effort to compensate for the growing shortage of thematic soldiers, emperors in Constantinople began hiring more and more mercenaries.<sup>12</sup> This in turn led to an overall increase in the cost of the Byzantine army as a whole and,

<sup>8</sup> Michael Psellos, *Michael Psellos: Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance*, 2 vols., ed. and transl. by Emile Renauld (Paris: Less Belles Lettres, 1926).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Attaleiates, *Historia* in *Michaelis Attaliote Historia*, ed. by Immanuel Bekker, CSHB (Bonn: Weber, 1853).

<sup>10</sup> Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis historion* in *Ioannis Scylitzæ Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. by Ioannes Thurn, CFHB (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979); Skylitzes, *Synecheia*.

<sup>11</sup> Contemporary Byzantine written sources clearly suggest that the Byzantines themselves considered the reign of Constantine IX a crucial period and mostly saw his reforms as the beginning of all the difficulties that the Byzantine Empire suffered afterward. See Tsoungarákis, “Κρίση,” 277–278.

<sup>12</sup> In this text, a mercenary is deemed a man who masters the military craft and takes remuneration for his military service. Foreign origin is not a condition. See Philippe Contamine, *Válka ve středověku* (Prague: Argo, 2004), 123.

in spite of the drop of its total numerical strength, to an excessive depletion of the treasury during the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>13</sup>

However, it has been recently proved quite convincingly that the first signs of decline of the thematic system occurred as early as the tenth century and that it actually reflected the gradual transformation of the then Byzantine military strategy from defensive to offensive.<sup>14</sup> Starting with Nikeforos II Fokas (963–969), the consequent Byzantine emperors adopted a series of reforms, after which the most important role in the new attack strategy was no longer played by *themata*, but by army units designed as *tagmata*, which were either made up of the “Romans” of the indigenous origin or composed of foreigners, that is, the “allied” mercenary troops.<sup>15</sup> *Tagmata* in fact represented the equivalent of today’s professional army and essentially only characterized the renewal of the model of military service common under the late Roman Republic and the Principate. Moreover, these regiments were better equipped, trained, and motivated for offensive warfare and, as such, naturally much more suitable for the Byzantine *reconquista* on the eastern border, which reached its peak in the final third of the tenth century.<sup>16</sup> The emperors after Nikeforos II Fokas, John I Tzimiskes (969–976), and Basileios II were in fact only mechanically implementing the policy of this great soldier-emperor by deploying *tagmata* for offensive warfare without considering new possible approaches.<sup>17</sup>

What also contributed to a certain neglect of the army during the eleventh century was the general sense of satisfaction and external safety acquired by the Byzantine elites achieved thanks to successful reconquest of areas in the East and the West. According to this line of thought, the Byzantine Empire once again reached its “natural” boundaries on the Danube and the Euphrates through the constant warfare at the turn of the eleventh century. Simultaneously, an illusion that long-lasting wars against traditional enemies brought about a final and “eternal” peace was slowly

<sup>13</sup>Karagiannópoulos, *Κράτος*, 176–177; Romilly J. H. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 368.

<sup>14</sup>Haldon, “Approaches,” 48–49, 61–62; Haldon, *Warfare*, 85–93; Cheynet, “Politique,” 61–73, and others.

<sup>15</sup>For description of the reforms, see Lemerle, “Tournant,” 265–267; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Β΄* 2, 332.

<sup>16</sup>Haldon, *Warfare*, 92; Haldon, “Approaches,” 62, 69–70; Cheynet, “Politique,” 62, 64, 73.

<sup>17</sup>Cheynt, “Politique,” 65.

setting in.<sup>18</sup> This belief then led to the opinion that under these new circumstances it is actually pointless to finance strong and, therefore, very expensive standing army, which could potentially become dangerous to imperial power.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, during the reign of the emperor Constantine IX, a new wave of reforms ensued, completing and stabilizing the changes and tendencies of previous decades.<sup>20</sup> Although *themata* were never abolished and in the case of a large military expedition could still be called to arms,<sup>21</sup> most units of the Byzantine army, whether in the provinces or around the capital, were formed by *tagmata* by the mid-eleventh century.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the number and size of troops gradually decreased as the central administration apparatus, in an attempt to reduce financial expenditure on the army, opted for pressing the Byzantium's neighbors by

<sup>18</sup> Haldon, "Approaches," 60–61; Cheynet, "Politique," 64; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρευση Β'*, 675–676, note 4043. Tsonugarákis, "Κρίση," 288. The pacifist view of the Byzantine nobility was reinforced by the traditional perception of war as primarily defensive activity. It is fully understandable that when the defensive was replaced by the offensive and all the enemies were pushed beyond the borders, the need to wage offensive wars was gradually perceived as superfluous. Moreover, from a Christian-ideological point of view, every war, whether offensive or defensive, was seen as something that is necessary from time to time, but certainly not desirable. See, for example, Ioannis Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz (7–11 Jahrhundert)* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2009), 207.

<sup>19</sup> As evidenced by the rebellions of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Fokas, as well as the acts of various Byzantine generals in the wake of the death of Basileios II.

<sup>20</sup> For brief recapitulation of reforms, see Cheynet, "Politique," 66.

<sup>21</sup> Romanos IV Diogenes assembled the army based on the original *themata* regiments, although it was already in a very poor condition. Attaleiates, 103; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 125; Haldon, "Approaches," 49.

<sup>22</sup> Since the mid-eleventh century, the military detachments in the provinces were headed by the *doukai*, that is, commanders of *tagmata*-type regiments, rather than the *stratēgoi*, who had traditionally commanded the *themata* units. See Hélène Ahrweiler, "Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin aux IX<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles. Index," in *Etudes sur les structures administratives et sociales de Byzance*, ed. by H. Ahrweiler and P. Lemerle (London: Variorum Reprints, 1971), 61–66; Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Du stratège de thème au duc: chronologie de l'évolution au cours du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *TM* 9 (1985): 181–194; Oikonomides, "Evolution," 143–148; Mártha Grigoríou-Ioanníδου, *Παρακμή και πτώση του θεματικού θεσμού* (Thessalonica, 1985), 141 (dissertation); Cheynet, "Politique," 66–67. Leveniōtis proposes the year of 1057 as the turning point after which the Byzantine army consisted almost exclusively of the *tagmata*-type units, see Geórgios A. Leveniōtis, *Το σασιαστικό κίνημα του Νορμανδού Ουρσελίου (Ursel de Bailleul) στην Μικρά Ασία (1073–1076)* (Thessalonica: Ekdóseis Vánias, 2004), 130.

less costly diplomatic means, taking advantage of its unremitting status of virtually invincible military superpower of the era of Basileios II.<sup>23</sup>

However, this benign foreign political situation lasted only until the late 1040s.<sup>24</sup> New enemies, no longer held at bay by the reputation of the Byzantine military superiority, appeared in the west, north, and east, ready to attack the imperial territories. It quickly became clear that the newly created defense system, while relatively sufficient for neutralizing isolated small-scale threats, was not suitable enough for dealing with simultaneous military pressure from all sides.<sup>25</sup> As a result, there was a sudden need to take quick action and adapt Byzantine defensive system to this new development. However, the problem arose when discussing the nature of this adjustment and specific measures that would put it into action. In the end, there were two feasible and essentially contradictory solutions which gained support among the Byzantine nobility, splitting it in two opposing groups—the former wanted to continue in the policy of conquest and, as such, supported maintenance of large army composed of traditional Byzantine<sup>26</sup> *themata* and *tagmata*. For example, strong partisans of this policy were the Diogenai from Kappadokia or Makedonian aristocratic families from Adrianoupolis (e.g., Romanos IV Diogenes).<sup>27</sup> The latter group sought to strengthen the mercenary *tagmata* in particular by a new set of reforms, which in fact aimed at introducing a full-time professional army composed of a number of smaller but, in terms of the combat experience and effectiveness, superior units of mercenaries of indigenous but

<sup>23</sup> Haldon, *Warfare*, 91; Haldon, “Approaches,” 60, 66. See also Tsoungarákis, “Κρίση,” 280.

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Haldon, “Approaches,” 65, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Haldon, *Warfare*, 65; Haldon, “Approaches,” 65.

<sup>26</sup> When using the attribute Byzantine, it should be reiterated that the Byzantine army was never strictly “national” in today’s sense of the word and that a large number of foreigners always served in it. See, for example, Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 66; Hans-Joachim Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Organisation der Tagmata* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1991), 44. Sometimes, however, the Byzantines themselves perceived the division line between foreign and indigenous mercenaries quite vaguely. It was enough for a foreign mercenary and his descendants to serve in the Byzantine army not to be perceived as a foreigner. See Leonora Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70.

<sup>27</sup> Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 347.

mostly foreign origin (known as *symmachoi/ethnikoi*).<sup>28</sup> Among the supporters of this policy were the influential Doukai and Komnenoi families (e.g., Michael VII Doukas).<sup>29</sup>

### 2.1.2 *Units and Command Structure*<sup>30</sup>

Like any other armed forces in the world today or in the past, the Byzantine army had its own characteristic structure, remotely reminding its predecessor, the imperial Roman army.<sup>31</sup> Because of the time span of more than half a millennium, this ancient Roman legacy was not reflected in the structure itself as such but rather in the basic guidelines along which it was organized. The commander-in-chief of the Byzantine army was the emperor who, even during the eleventh century, did not lose the right to assume direct command over the entire army and lead it to combat in person. If, for various reasons, any emperor did not choose to follow in the footsteps of his glorious predecessors, it was always at his own discretion. Until 1081, the command of the imperial army was de facto held by two supreme commanders (*domestikoi tōn Scholōn*), who were originally commanders of the oldest imperial “guard” *tagmata* called the *Scholai*,<sup>32</sup> whose origin is derived from the Roman imperial court guards of Late

<sup>28</sup> Professional mercenary units that were better trained and, therefore, more efficient than the original *themata* no longer had to be that numerous. Haldon, “Approaches,” 70. For *ethnikoi* detachments see text below, as well as Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 34.

<sup>29</sup> Cheynet, “Politique,” 69–70; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 337, 347. See Grigoriou-Ioannidou, *Παρακμή*, 139–140. See text below.

<sup>30</sup> At this point, it should be stressed that this overview of the structure of the Byzantine army is far from being exhaustive. I focus mainly on units that formed part of the field army or regularly participated in military campaigns. Garrisons of individual fortresses and cities, as well as special forces, are not included here because of minimal references to them in period sources and because of the fact that they played only a marginal role in the events discussed below. The roughly same criteria are applied in the case of the navy, see below.

<sup>31</sup> Warren T. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284–1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 117.

<sup>32</sup> The *Scholai* included 6000 mounted riders. Treadgold, *Army*, 116. Cheynet came to a lower estimate, with between 1500 and 4000 men serving in this elite unit, see Cheynet, “Les effectifs de l’armée byzantine au X<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> s.,” *Cahiers de la civilisation médiévale* 38 (1995): 322; Raffaele D’Amato and Guiseppe Rava, *Byzantine Imperial Guardsmen 925–1025* (London: Osprey, 2012), 14.



Antiquity named the *scholae palatinae*.<sup>33</sup> It was a double command function, because each of the *domestikoi* was the supreme commander in the territory of one half of the Empire—the western and the eastern.<sup>34</sup> Primarily, they were in command of the aforementioned cavalry units of the *Scholai*, as well as other cavalry troops stationed in close proximity to the Byzantine capital. Together with the elite troops of mercenaries of foreign origin (*Hetaireia*)<sup>35</sup> and the Varangian guard,<sup>36</sup> they formed the most battle-worthy nucleus of the entire Byzantine army and emperors (or *domestikoi* or other top senior officers in charge of the supreme command) usually set out at their head from Constantinople for military campaigns to all threatened border sections of the Empire. In particular, these core

<sup>33</sup>This “oldest” and most prestigious unit of the Byzantine army is mentioned already in the famous manuscript *Notitia dignitatum* from the early fifth century. Kühn, *Armee*, 73; Ian Heath and Angus McBride, *Byzantine Armies 886–1118* (London: Osprey, 1979), 10–12. They were reorganized into a mounted unit in the mid-eighth century. D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 14.

<sup>34</sup>Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 26. This doubling of the Byzantine army’s supreme command dates back to the reign of Romanos II (959–963). A more prominent position belonged to the *domestikos* of the East (*domestikos tōn Scholōn tēs Anatolēs*). Kühn, *Armee*, 81, 135–136.

<sup>35</sup>This unit was established during the reign of Leo V (813–820) to provide guard services in the imperial palace, as well as military entourage of the emperor during military campaigns. The commander of the *Hetaireia* regiment held the title *hetaireiarchēs*, and its numerical strength amounted to 1200 men. Michael J. Decker, *The Byzantine Art of War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2013), 79. This unit was not originally part of the *tagmata*, but during the eleventh century the aforementioned formal difference was practically lost. Kühn, *Armee*, 68.

<sup>36</sup>The Varangian guard was originally 6000 strong. Treadgold, *Army*, 115. However, this number changed over time. Moreover, the entire unit never stayed in Constantinople as a whole, as its detachments of varying size were either sent to the provinces as garrisons or took part in various campaigns. Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 323. For the Varangian guard, see Sigfus Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium: An Aspect of Byzantine Military History*, transl., rev. and rewrit. by Benedict S. Benedikz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and most recently also D’Amato and Rava, *The Varangian Guard 988–1453*; Theotokis, “Rus, Varangian and Frankish Mercenaries in the Service of the Byzantine Emperors (9th–11th c.): Numbers, Organisation and Battle Tactics in the Operational Theatres of Asia Minor and the Balkans,” *Vyzantina symmeikta* 22 (2012): 135–145. In addition to the warriors of Scandinavian origin, members of the Anglo-Saxon nobility who, as a result of the lost battle of Hastings in 1066, left England after its domination by the Norman duke William the Conqueror (1035–1087) formed a significant part of the Varangian guard since the early 1070s. See Ciggaar, “Varangues,” 301–342; Shephard, “English,” 74–78.

units included the elite<sup>37</sup> *tagmata* known as the *Exkoubitai*,<sup>38</sup> the *Athanatoi*,<sup>39</sup> the *Bigla*,<sup>40</sup> and the *Hikanatoi*.<sup>41</sup> The logistical support of these fully professional cavalry units was the responsibility of the *tagma* of the *Optimatoi*, the only “non-combat” unit of the Byzantine army.<sup>42</sup>

Under this supreme command and its associated units, there were officers of individual provincial units (*themata* or *tagmata*),<sup>43</sup> who, in accordance with traditions and a type of the unit, held titles of *stratēgos*, *doux*,

<sup>37</sup>The units of *Scholai*, *Exkoubitai*, *Hikanatoi*, and *Bigla* were usually referred to by the Byzantines as imperial *tagmata* (*basilika tagmata*) due to their long association with the imperial power. Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 25. This summary designation does not include the *Athanatoi* guard, though, as this regiment was created only later. See note 39.

<sup>38</sup>The *Exkoubitai* (lat. *Excubitores*) guard represents the second “oldest” unit of the Byzantine army founded by Leo I (457–474). Heath and McBride, *Armies*, 12; D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 21. Treadgold assumes a large number of 6000 men. Treadgold, *Army*, 116. Cheynet again comes up with a significantly lower number of only 700 cavalrymen, though. Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 322. After the reorganization in the eighth century, it consisted of at least 18 *banda* and was commanded by a *domestikos*. Kühn, *Armee*, 93–94. With 150 cavalrymen per *bandon*, it meant that about 2700 soldiers served in this guard regiment.

<sup>39</sup>The founder of the *Athanatoi* was John I Tzimiskes in 970. Dennis, *Treatises*, 255; D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 24. The role of this elite mounted unit was to form a vanguard of the entire Byzantine army during military expeditions. Decker, *War*, 81. In total, there were 4000 cavalrymen in this *tagma*. Treadgold, *Army*, 116.

<sup>40</sup>Sometimes referred to by an older name as the *Aritimos* (lat. *Numeri*), the *Bigla* was probably founded in the sixth century as a unit called *comites arcadiaci*, and its officers mainly performed guard services, even during military campaigns, where, besides other duties, they were in charge of guarding the prisoners of war. Heath and McBride, *Armies*, 13. The *Bigla* had a total of 4000 cavalrymen. Treadgold, *Army*, 116. This *tagma* was later re-established in 786 by the empress Eirene (797–802). D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 22.

<sup>41</sup>The *Hikanatoi*, which was commanded by a *domestikos*, was founded by Nikeforos I (802–811) in 809 or 810. Kühn, *Armee*, 116; Decker, *War*, 78; D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 23. According to Treadgold, 4000 cavalrymen served in this unit. Treadgold, *Army*, 116. In contrast, Cheynet assumes only 456 of these cavalrymen in the mid-tenth century. Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 322. However, this number clearly shows that this is only part of the whole unit, because exactly the same number of soldiers took part in the failed campaign against Crete in 949. See Heath and McBride, *Armies*, 13; Kühn, *Armee*, 118.

<sup>42</sup>For more information, see Kühn, *Armee*, 67–68; Decker, *War*, 102–103.

<sup>43</sup>In a modern context, *tagmata* could perhaps represent divisions. *Tagmata* had become the dominant form of the Byzantine military units before Alexios Komnenos’ coup in 1081. See Armin Holzhweg, *Beiträge zur Verwaltungsgeschichte des Oströmischen Reiches unter den Komnenen*, Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia, Heft 1 (München: Institut für Byzantinistik und neugriechische Philologie der Universität, 1965), 43.

*katepanō*, *domestikos*, *akolouthos*, *droungarios*,<sup>44</sup> and so on. These generals were appointed to their posts directly by the emperor.<sup>45</sup> Generally, they also had at their disposal one or several deputies (*topotērētai*),<sup>46</sup> staff (*offikia*),<sup>47</sup> and possibly also their own retinue of bodyguards and servants (*betaireia*, *anthrōpoi*).<sup>48</sup> As mentioned above, since the mid-eleventh century the number of mercenary units of the *tagmata* type gradually increased, as they were more flexible and better meeting the demands of the imperial government. These units were not always composed only of mercenaries of foreign origin;<sup>49</sup> they were frequently made up of indigenous soldiers or some older Byzantine *themata* (from both eastern and western half of the Empire) that were reorganized into the new professional *tagmata*.<sup>50</sup> The primary sources mention indigenous Byzantine *rōmaika tagmata*, with their designation implying the area of origin of their recruits, for example, *tagma Pisidōn*, *Lykaonōn*, *Frygōn*, *Asianōn*, *Makedōnōn*, *Thrakōn*, *Thettalōn*, *Armenion*, *Kolōnciatōn*, *Chaldiōn*, *Charsiniatōn*, and *Kappadokōn*.<sup>51</sup> During the eleventh century, there were attempts to create other elite units similar to *basilika tagmata* (e.g., the *Megathymoi* in 1040/1041),<sup>52</sup> but they did not have any lasting effects.

<sup>44</sup>For the development of some of these rank titles, see Cheynet, “Stratégie,” 181–194. *Droungarios* is the general designation of the commander of a detachment smaller than the *tagma* (see text below), but in the case of the *Aritimos*, its commander was also called *droungarios tēs biglēs*, and his rank was equal to the rank of other *tagmata* commanders. Kühn, *Armee*, 104. Written sources also provide colloquial terms such as *archōn*, *exarchōn*, *afēgoumenos*, *exēgoumenos*, *komēs* (usually instead of *domestikos*), or *tagmatarchēs*. Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 26.

<sup>45</sup>Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 26.

<sup>46</sup>Decker, *War*, 78.

<sup>47</sup>The staff consisted of a representative (*topotērētēs*) and all commanders of lower subordinate units up to the commanders of individual *banda* (*komētes*) together with other officers, for example, administration officer (*chartoularios* or *skribōn*), standard-bearer (*bandoforos*), and messengers (*mandatores*). Kühn, *Armee*, 72, 84, 86.

<sup>48</sup>The size of this armed entourage of each commander depended on his social status among the Byzantine nobility and the importance of his military rank, and could thus fluctuate from several dozen to several thousand men. Jean-Claude Cheynet, “The Byzantine Aristocracy (8th–13th centuries),” *The Byzantine Aristocracy and its Military Function*, ed. by J.-C. Cheynet (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 34–35.

<sup>49</sup>Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 34.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 34–35.

<sup>52</sup>Oikonomides, “Evolution,” 143. This unit disappeared very soon from the written evidence. Kühn, *Armee*, 249–250.

The subdivision of these larger units, having mostly several thousand men,<sup>53</sup> depended on their affiliation with either cavalry or infantry, as well as whether it was a decimal or a tactical division or a division into traditional smaller organizational units, which arose from their long continuous development, dating very often back to the Late Antiquity. Within the decimal system,<sup>54</sup> there were senior officers commanding a thousand men (*chiliarchia/taxiarchia*) referred to as *chiliarches/taxiarches*.<sup>55</sup> Under them served junior officers (*mikroi archontes*),<sup>56</sup> then centurions in command of a hundred men (*kentarchia*) entitled *kentarches/hekatontarches*,<sup>57</sup> followed by *pentakontarches* in command of fifty men (centurion's deputy), then *dekarches*<sup>58</sup> in charge of ten men (*dekarchia*, or *kontubernion*),<sup>59</sup> and, finally, *pentarches* (decurion's deputy) commanding five men (*pentarchia*).<sup>60</sup>

In cavalry and infantry, a tripartite system seems to have been applied in the vast majority of divisions into smaller organizational units, that is, each unit was mostly split into three subdivisions (although there may have been fewer or more of them, depending on the actual number of soldiers available in the unit).<sup>61</sup> From this point of view, until the mid-tenth century, the classic cavalry *themata* were divided into three *tourmai*

<sup>53</sup>In addition to the aforementioned *tagmata* stationed in the capital, the numerical strength of which is known, the size of other *tagmata* located in the provinces is often shrouded in mystery. In general, however, it is supposed that they were smaller in size than the original thematic units they replaced. The exception was probably the *tagma*, or perhaps several *tagmata* from Makedonia and Thrace, whose overall numerical strength is estimated at 10,000 men. See Cheynet, "Politique militaire," 67.

<sup>54</sup>The decimal division system was applied mainly to the temporary tactical division of units during the military campaign. Timothy Dawson and Guiseppe Rava, *Byzantine Cavalryman c. 900–1204* (London: Osprey, 2009), 13. This system was introduced as early as the tenth century. Decker, *War*, 80.

<sup>55</sup>Nowadays, *taxiarchia* could be compared to a regiment.

<sup>56</sup>In the modern notion, their equivalent would be petty officers, even if the rank does not correspond precisely. For greater military ranks starting with centurion and higher, the Byzantines used the collective denomination *megaloi archontes*. Kühn, *Armee*, 71.

<sup>57</sup>The approximate modern equivalent of *kentarchia* could be a company.

<sup>58</sup>Dawson and Rava, *Cavalryman*, 12.

<sup>59</sup>This unit corresponds to a modern squad. In this case, the ten soldiers include the commander of the squad and his deputy, that is, eight soldiers plus a *pentarchos* and a *dekarchos*. See Timothy Dawson and Angus McBride, *Byzantine Infantryman: Eastern Roman Empire c. 900–1204* (London: Osprey, 2007), 12.

<sup>60</sup>Dawson and Rava, *Cavalryman*, 12.

<sup>61</sup>This division best corresponded to the basic tactical field division of the Byzantine army—the center and the right and the left flanks.

(commanded by *tourmarchēs*),<sup>62</sup> each of which contained three to five subunits called *droungoi* (commanded by *droungarios*),<sup>63</sup> which were further divided into basic Byzantine cavalry units called *banda* (the commander was the count or *komēs*).<sup>64</sup> Concerning professional mercenary units, the cavalry *tagma* was divided along similar lines into three *taxiarchiai/parataxeis* (commanded by a *taxiarchos*), which were further subdivided into an unspecified number of *bandon/allagion*<sup>65</sup> units (the division depended on the real number of soldiers in a *taxiarchia*). The numerical force of individual units and subunits fluctuated greatly, so it is mostly impossible to say with certainty how strong the formation was, except for the aforementioned *taxiarchiai*, where the numerical strength ranged from a few hundred to about a thousand soldiers.<sup>66</sup> The basic and smallest tactical cavalry unit on the battlefield was a *bandon*.<sup>67</sup>

In the case of infantry, the organizational structure was similar, with infantry *tagma* divided into three or more units called *meros* (commanded by *merarchos*),<sup>68</sup> further into three *taxiarchiai/droungoi* (commanded by *taxiarchos/droungarios*) each having a thousand men.<sup>69</sup> Each *taxiarchia* was divided into three sections called *arithmos/bandon* (commanded by

<sup>62</sup>Each *tourma* consisted of 600 to 800 cavalymen. Haldon, *Warfare*, 116. Its modern equivalent could be a brigade. David Nicolle and Christa Hook, *Mantzikert 1071: The Breaking of Byzantium* (London: Osprey, 2013), 25.

<sup>63</sup>Each *droungos* was 200 to 400 cavalymen strong. Haldon, *Warfare*, 116. It roughly corresponds to the modern battalion.

<sup>64</sup>A classical *bandon* of the mid-tenth century had around 200 to 400 cavalymen, but the number later decreased to 50 or 150. Haldon, *Warfare*, 116. At the same time, it is clear that with the gradual decline of the thematic units, they fell into oblivion, as the designation such as *tourmai* and *droungoi* ceased to be used, and the terms typical for tagmatic units began to prevail. Haldon, *Warfare*, 116. A *bandon* could correspond to a modern platoon.

<sup>65</sup>Haldon, *Warfare*, 116.

<sup>66</sup>Each infantry *taxiarchia* contained 500 infantrymen, 200 light infantrymen armed with spears and 300 archers. These figures can be found in the military treatise on tactics *De re militari* by an unknown author from the late tenth century. See George T. Dennis, *Three Military Treatises in Tres tractatus byzantini de re militari*, ed. and transl. by George T. Dennis, CFHB, vol. XXV (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), 247, 269.

<sup>67</sup>Treadgold, *Army*, 114.

<sup>68</sup>Dawson and McBride, *Infantryman*, 12.

<sup>69</sup>Kekaumenos, *Strategikon* in *Κεκαυμενος, Στρατηγικόν*, transl. by Dimitris Tsougarakis (Athens: Agrostis, 1996), 111.

*komēs*).<sup>70</sup> Each *bandon* consisted of 200–400 foot soldiers, and it was split into the corresponding number of subunits of 100 (*kentarchia*) and 10 men (*dekarchia*) respectively.<sup>71</sup> The basic tactical unit on the battlefield was *kentarchia*.<sup>72</sup> The tactical commander of all infantry units during a military campaign was the *hoplitarchēs/archegētēs*.<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned above, during the late eleventh century, there was a steady rise in the number of mercenary units composed exclusively of foreigners (Franks/Normans, Germans, English, Saracens/Seljuk Turks, Alans, Varangians, Rus', etc.), who had their own internal structure, weapons, and equipment, as well as the number of men corresponding to the military traditions of their specific areas of origin.<sup>74</sup> These predominantly cavalry units of allies (also called *symmachoi*, or *symmachika tagmata*) were incorporated into the Byzantine army as a whole as *tagmata* under their own (sometimes a Byzantine, though) commander, and their role was mainly to protect exposed and vulnerable border areas.<sup>75</sup> Their numerical strength also varied greatly; there could have been units with a few thousand, or just a few hundred men, with the latter being more

<sup>70</sup>The division into *bandon* or *arithmos* was only of organizational nature, and on the battlefield the *taxiarchiai* were divided only into *kentarchiai* and *dekarchiai*.

<sup>71</sup>Dawson and McBride, *Infantryman*, 12.

<sup>72</sup>Treadgold, *Army*, 114.

<sup>73</sup>Dennis, *Treatises*, 265.

<sup>74</sup>Their numerical strength, as well as their actual size, certainly fluctuated significantly and thus is hard to be estimated. Treadgold, *Army*, 85. Mercenaries of various foreign origins are regularly mentioned between ca. early 1060s and late 1080s in many of the imperial documents (mainly *chrysoboulloī logoi*) issued for ecclesiastic (bishops, monasteries) or secular institutions, or even wealthy landowners in connection with exemption (*exkousseia*) of certain (or all) obligations deduced from their possession of landed estates. One of such obligations was housing and provisioning of military units on the property (*mitaton*). Sometimes the texts include rather lengthy lists, which provide intriguing insight in the composition of the mercenary units at a given moment. For instance, in the *chrysoboullōs logos* of the emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates for the monastery of Vatopedi on the Mount Athos in January 1080 we read: „Ρῶς, Βαράγγων, Κουλιγγων, Ἰγγλίνων, Φράγγων, Νεμιτζῶν, Βουλγάρων, Σαρακινῶν...”, see: Jacques Bompaire, Jacques Lefort, Vassiliki Kravari and Christophe Giros, *Actes de Vatopédi I. Des origines à 1329*. Édition diplomatique. Texte. Archives de l’Athos XXI, (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 2001), 112.

<sup>75</sup>Treadgold, *Army*, 116; Oikonomides, “Evolution,” 144.

common.<sup>76</sup> There were also auxiliary troops consisting of foreigners who settled on the territory of the Byzantine Empire (*ethnikoi*),<sup>77</sup> whose numbers were also wide-ranging.<sup>78</sup> They were often headed by a commander of the same origin as the rank-and-file soldiers, usually referred to as *ethnarchēs*.<sup>79</sup>

### 2.1.3 *Commanders*

It is true for all medieval armies (hence, also for the Byzantine) that their performance on the battlefield depended directly on the actual or presumed qualities of those in command.<sup>80</sup> This fact is based on the very nature of military engagements at the time, in which, in fact, no personal initiative of the rank-and-file soldiers was expected or encouraged.<sup>81</sup> Quite the opposite, all their activities prior to the combat and, of course, during the actual fighting were firmly given, because the need to maintain combat formation incessantly was of the utmost concern.<sup>82</sup> It also needs to be considered that in the case of medieval armies there was no officer corps in its own sense, which would bring commanders together into a well-defined and separate caste within the army, and that there were virtually no institutions to ensure the training of new officer staff. Thus, the quality of the commanders in the Middle Ages fluctuated greatly and became one of the most important factors influencing the outcome of battles, campaigns, or wars. Nevertheless, the Byzantine army was slightly better off than the contemporary medieval hosts of West Europe. This was mainly due to the fact that the Byzantines, in many ways, followed up on the Roman army, the first professional army in history. Many military traditions continued to be practiced uninterrupted from the fifth to eleventh centuries, such as the practice of keeping professional full-time soldiers as

<sup>76</sup> For examples of units with known numerical force, see Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 323–324.

<sup>77</sup> Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 34.

<sup>78</sup> Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 325. See text below.

<sup>79</sup> Oikonomides, “Evolution,” 143; Kühn, *Armee*, 267–268.

<sup>80</sup> Decker, *War*, 44; John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades 1000–1300* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 149.

<sup>81</sup> Decker, *War*, 42–43.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. Adherence to strict discipline was also required because of the different ethnic and cultural origins of soldiers. Haldon, “Approaches,” 50.

mercenaries,<sup>83</sup> or the tradition of writing military treatises and manuals, due to which the knowledge in the art of war of the Greek and Roman Antiquity, enriched with more recent combat experience, was passed on to subsequent generations of soldiers.<sup>84</sup>

The above overview of the structure of the eleventh-century Byzantine army clearly shows that it retained a relatively high degree of organization. This implied a developed military hierarchy<sup>85</sup> and a high demand for commanders of various ranks. In Byzantium, most commanders were recruited from among the aristocrats,<sup>86</sup> although in exceptional cases it was possible for a low-born talented individual to gradually work his way up to a high command position.<sup>87</sup> Of course, kinship and social contacts (friendship with high-ranking individuals or with the emperor himself) played a significant role in this process.<sup>88</sup> Some noble families in the provinces

<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere in Europe, the concept of standing army was abandoned, and military forces were gathered for specific purposes and for the duration of the conflict only. The basis of a typical medieval host in western and central Europe consisted of armed retinues of great landowners (feudals). Although the use of mercenaries was later reinstated, initially even mercenary units were hired for the duration of hostilities only and disbanded when the peace was restored. Full transition from feudal hosts to standing armies occurred at the turn of the fifteenth century. Contamine, *Válka*, 194–195. For some revision of this rather traditional perception, at least as far as the Carolingian period is concerned, see Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, *Warfare in Medieval Europe c.400-c.1453* (London: Routledge, 2017), 112–113.

<sup>84</sup> In Byzantium, these military manuals, written between the sixth and early eleventh centuries, were called *taktika* or *strategikon*. The most famous ones include the *Strategikon* of the emperor Maurikios (582–602), the *Taktika* of the emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912), three treatises of his son Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913–959), a treatise on skirmishing and a treatise on fight in the East by Nikeforos II Fokas (963–969), and a treatise by the general Nikeforos Ouranos (turn of the eleventh century). Denis Sullivan, “Byzantine Military Manuals: Prescriptions, Practice, and Pedagogy,” *The Byzantine World*, ed. by Paul Stephenson (London: Routledge, 2010), 150–160. In the medieval West, no new military works were written until the sixteenth century, and from the varied selection of late-ancient military literature, only one manual, also known to the Byzantines, survived and was widely copied—*Epitoma de re Militari* from the turn of the fifth century by Flavius Vegetius Renatus. See Contamine, *Válka*, 249–250; Bachrach and Bachrach, *Warfare*, 380–381; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 72–73.

<sup>85</sup> Decker, *War*, 42.

<sup>86</sup> At this point, it should be noted that the Byzantine society did not have genuine aristocracy or never legally defined aristocracy as a separate social class from other citizens. See Jean-Claude Cheynet, “Aristocratic Anthroponymy in Byzantium,” *The Byzantine Aristocracy and its Military Function*, ed. by Jean-Claude Cheynet (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

<sup>87</sup> Cheynet, “Aristocracy,” 17–18.

<sup>88</sup> John Haldon, *Byzantium at War: AD 600–1453* (Oxford: Osprey, 2002), 63.



(especially in Asia Minor, but also in Thrace) were in fact “specializing” in the art of warfare and produced several famous and talented military leaders over several generations.<sup>89</sup> This created a kind of hereditary commander caste occupying the highest military posts, whose members came from the same few families and passed on the military know-how from father to son.<sup>90</sup> Other talented commanders began their careers and gained their military experience while serving a distinguished general.<sup>91</sup> However, a noble origin (*eugeneia*) itself was not the only basis for a successful military career, and every officer had to demonstrate sooner or later his capabilities and qualities if he wanted to maintain his command post and/or advance his career.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, the preserved Byzantine historical sources understandably focus on the high-ranking officers of the Byzantine army (*megaloi archontes*), so all the details of the process of forming military personnel at lower levels and the exact criteria for their assessment are not entirely clear.

Nevertheless, it is precisely thanks to these military manuals that it is possible to estimate, at least to some extent, the knowledge and experience, as well as personal characteristics of an ideal commander. It can be concluded that, with some exceptions, these requirements remind us of criteria expected in contemporary armed forces.<sup>93</sup> According to the tenth-century Byzantine treatise on the strategy of an anonymous author,<sup>94</sup> a military commander should be naturally intelligent; lead an orderly, moral, and religiously impeccable life; have a wealth of experience in the field of warfare (strategies and tactics); be able to control his acts and his emotional reactions; be cold-blooded and thoughtful; and, above all, take care of his soldiers. He should be able to think clearly and logically and always

<sup>89</sup>There were several such military aristocratic families known in the eleventh century, appearing in historical sources since the ninth or tenth centuries (the families of Kourkouas, Fokas, Skleros, Diogenes, Maleinos, Doukas, Melissenos, Komnenos, etc.). For the process of creation of aristocratic families and their surnames, see Cheynet, “Anthroponymy,” 1–30.

<sup>90</sup>Decker, *War*, 43. During this period, it was customary for a young member of an aristocratic military family to complete his first military expedition against enemies at the age of about fourteen. Konstantínos Varzós, *Γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών*. Βυζαντινά κείμενα και μελέται 20a. Τόμος Α (Thessalonica: Κέντρο vyzantinón erevnón, 1984), 62, note 4 in Chap. 1.

<sup>91</sup>Haldon, *War*, 63.

<sup>92</sup>Decker, *War*, 43.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>94</sup>See *Anonymi byzantini peri strategikes, or the Anonymous Byzantine treatise on strategy in Treatises*, ed. and transl. by George T. Dennis, 1–135.

formulate the best solution bringing the most advantages.<sup>95</sup> He should also act militarily and manly, have a natural talent to lead and command men and be a role model for them, be in good physical condition so as to easily endure physical hardship and hard work when needed.<sup>96</sup>

Similar personal features of the commander-in-chief can be found in the opening passages of the *Taktika* written by the emperor Leo VI (886–912) at the turn of the tenth century.<sup>97</sup> This educated Byzantine emperor adds several other characteristics—above all, a good commander should be fair,<sup>98</sup> show the ability to act with discretion even in unexpected circumstances, and quickly overcome critical moments. Moreover, he should be married and have children (which was supposed to help him take better care of soldiers), be vigilant at nights over extended periods of time so as to have time to analyze events in detail and not omit anything significant. On the other hand, he should not be greedy or too young or too old, and he should be a capable speaker to cheer his men before the fight.<sup>99</sup> He should not be too poor or too rich, and it was also appropriate, although not strictly required, for him to be a descendant of famous and noble ancestors.<sup>100</sup> Neither should he be too lenient nor too austere or harsh on his subordinates, and he should also be modest and generous when remunerating them.<sup>101</sup>

The list of expected personal characteristics is finally complemented by the *Strategikon* written by the Byzantine general Kekaumenos in the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>102</sup> In a way, this military manual is exceptional because it replicates previous treatises to a much lesser extent than the other ones and contains more practical instructions illustrated by examples of real events gained during the author's long military career. In addition to the above qualities, Kekaumenos reiterates that a good commander is primarily the one who cares about justice.<sup>103</sup> From a military

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Leon ο Sofos, *Αυτοκράτορος Λέοντος Τακτικά*. Τόμος Α΄. Μετάφρασις – σχόλια: Κωνσταντίνος Ποταμιάνος. Τελική επεξεργασία κειμένου και γενική επιμέλεια έργου: Δημήτρα Αθανασοπούλου (Athens: Eléfteri sképsis, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–31.

<sup>100</sup> Leon ο Sofos, *Τακτικά*, 33; Decker, *War*, 42.

<sup>101</sup> Leon ο Sofos: *Τακτικά*, 37.

<sup>102</sup> Kekaumenos, 60–86, 94–112, 128–129.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 79, 85.

point of view, the commander should constantly think about how to increase the influence and prestige of the Byzantine Empire and how to defeat adversaries with as few losses as possible. It is best to defeat the enemy by using a stratagem and only when unavoidable open a pitched battle.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, it is important that the commander constantly monitors the movements and intentions of the enemy with the help of spies and scouts.<sup>105</sup> In the event of a fight, it was necessary that the commander was neither too brave nor too fainthearted<sup>106</sup>—he should keep calm at all times and not panic. In the event of defeat, he should not run away from the fight without an attempt at saving the troops entrusted to him (besides saving himself).<sup>107</sup> The commander was supposed to surround himself with capable advisers.<sup>108</sup> What is very interesting, however, is Kekaumenos' advice that a good commander should study older military manuals and history books regularly in his spare time, including the Old Testament for the depiction of the tactics used by the Jews against the Canaanites.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, however, he warns that if the commander faces a situation for which he does not find a fitting solution in the old handbooks, he should come up with his own solution.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 55; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 71.

<sup>105</sup> Kekaumenos, 53.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 55–57.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 63. This characteristic trait quite clearly refers to the direct link between the characteristics and the nature of the commander and the fighting spirit and morale of his subordinates.

<sup>108</sup> Kekaumenos, 61.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 65. In other words, an ideal commander was to be able to respond adequately in any foreseeable and unpredictable situation. Haldon, "Approaches," 51.

## 2.2 BYZANTINE NAVY

### 2.2.1 *Development of the Byzantine Navy in the Eleventh Century*

In comparison to the transformation of the Byzantine army outlined above, the Byzantine navy experienced an even more rapid decline than ground forces during this period and almost ceased to exist. Paradoxically, the favorable geopolitical situation after the death of Basileios II Boulgaroktonos (976–1025) played a significant role in this detrimental process. Not only did the Byzantine Empire have no serious adversaries on land, but the long-standing threat of Arab pirate raids from North Africa to Byzantine territories in the south of Italy, the Greek mainland, and coastal areas of Asia Minor had effectively disappeared due to the political fragmentation of the area in combination with the weakening of the power of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt.<sup>111</sup> During the reign of Constantine IX, the Byzantine ruling elite in Constantinople came to believe that the costly warfleet had actually done its part and that it was no longer needed,<sup>112</sup> or that its units were to be redeployed from combat duty against external enemies to patrolling entrusted parts of the coastland and keeping order and security in Byzantine waters.<sup>113</sup> Complicated and expensive

<sup>111</sup> Κόνσταντίνος Α. Αλεξανδρίσ, *Ἡ θαλασσία δύναμις εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν τῆς Βυζαντινῆς αὐτοκρατορίας* (Athens, 1957), 292–293; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 162; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 89. The Byzantine sources record the last raid of Arab pirates from North Africa and Sicily to the Cyclades and the coast of Asia Minor (Lydia) in 1035. See Skylitzes, 398–399. The latest literature suggests that the first signs of the decline in the Byzantine navy appeared even before Basileios II took the throne, that is, during the reign of John Tzimiskes. See Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 76–77.

<sup>112</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 161–162, 169–170.

<sup>113</sup> In fact, this Byzantine policy of resignation to control maritime routes and trade allowed the subsequent sharp expansion of Italian maritime republics (such as Amalfi, Venice, Genoa, and Pisa), which gradually filled the power vacuum first in the Western part and then throughout the whole of the Mediterranean since the mid-eleventh century. Frederick M. Hocker, “Late Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic Galleys and Fleets,” *The Age of the Galley: Mediterranean Oared Vessels since Pre-Classical Times*, ed. by Robert Gardiner and John Morrison (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1995), 93.

maintenance of large warships known as dromons (*dromōnes*)<sup>114</sup> of the imperial fleet at Constantinople (*basilikon ploimon*) thus ceased to be a priority.<sup>115</sup> New tasks in question were to be mastered by faster and smaller

<sup>114</sup>A dromon (*dromōn*) was the main type of a war galley of the Byzantine navy *par excellence* since its birth at the turn of the sixth century. Ekkerhard Eickhoff, *Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966), 136–137. Originally, it was a fast monoreme with a narrow wooden hull covered with a carvel planking of circa twenty-eight meters in length, fully decked, fitted with two masts carrying lateen sails. By the tenth century, it developed into a powerful bireme with two masts equipped also with various fighting platforms called castles on the prow, amidships, and at the stern (*xylokastra*). Its main armament was a period artillery consisting of different types of catapults (*mangana*). See Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 57–72; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 163–173, 192 ff. For a more detailed description of the development of this type of warship, see John H. Pryor, “From Dromōn to Galea: Mediterranean Bireme Galleys,” *The Age of the Galley: Mediterranean Oared Vessels since Pre-Classical Times*, ed. by Robert Gardiner and John Morrison (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1995), 101–102; Angus Konstam, *Byzantine Warship vs. Arab Warship, 7th–11th Centuries* (London: Osprey, 2015), 20–24, 28–36, 41. In addition, the dromons of the imperial fleet in Constantinople were equipped with the so-called Greek or liquid fire (*hygron pyr*). For more on the history of the Greek fire, see, for example, Jonathan R. Partington, *A History of Greek Fire and Gunpowder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Theódoros Korrés, “Υγρόν πῦρ Ἐνα ὄπλο της βυζαντινῆς ναυτικῆς τακτικῆς (Thessalonica, 1995); John Haldon and Maurice Byrne, “A Possible Solution to the Problem of Greek Fire,” *Byz. Zeitsch.* 70 (1977): 91–99, and the most recent reassessment by John Haldon: John Haldon, “«Greek fire» revisited: recent and current research,” in *Byzantine Style, religion and Civilization: in honor of Steven Runciman*, edited by Elisabeth Jeffreys, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 290–325. Until now, it has not been possible to reconstruct satisfactorily the design of these oared vessels, as there are only written references and several conflicting images of different time and origin available to us (see Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 58–59; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 299–300; Ronald Bockius, “Zur Modellrekonstruktion einer byzantinischen Dromone (Chelandion) des 10./11. Jahrhunderts im Forschungsgebiet antike Schifffahrt, RGZM Mainz,” *Die byzantinischen Häfen Konstantinopels*, ed. by Falko Daim and Jörg Drauschke (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 2016), 451–453). This situation is likely to change once the results of the recently completed archaeological research in Istanbul (Yenikapı) on the site of the former Theodosios’ Harbor are fully published; between 2004 and 2013, researchers found thirty-seven shipwrecks out of which the remains of six warships were uncovered (since they were smaller in size, they were probably *galeai* rather than dromons, see note 116). For preliminary results and a description of all shipwrecks found, see Ufuk Kocabaş, “The Yenikapı Byzantine-Era Shipwrecks, Istanbul, Turkey: A Preliminary Report and Inventory of the 27 Wrecks Studied by Istanbul University,” *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 44, vol. 1 (2015): 5–38; Cemal Pulak, Rebecca Ingram and Michael Jones, “Eight Byzantine Shipwrecks from the Theodosian Harbour Excavations at Yenikapı in Istanbul, Turkey: An Introduction,” *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 44, vol. 1 (2015): 39–73.

<sup>115</sup>Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 161.

(and, of course, cheaper) types of war vessels (*galeai*),<sup>116</sup> belonging to provincial fleets,<sup>117</sup> or mercenary vessels with crews hired for this purpose and assigned to the imperial fleet.<sup>118</sup> If possible, the fleets of Byzantine allies, especially the Venetians,<sup>119</sup> but sometimes also the Dalmatian Slavs, who, in addition to trade, had already been engaged in piracy, were preferentially used since the reign of Basileios II.<sup>120</sup>

Since the Byzantine navy also formed an integral part of the Byzantine armed forces, it was divided like the ground forces into troops of the *themata* and *tagmata* types.<sup>121</sup> Similarly to the development on the land, the already mentioned process of preference of the *tagmata* units (imperial Constantinopolitan fleet and its subdivisions) took place also in the ranks of the navy.<sup>122</sup> Thus, by the mid-eleventh century the thematic units represented by provincial fleets almost disappeared from the radar of written sources.<sup>123</sup> Their place was gradually taken over by smaller squadrons sent to these areas directly from the capital (i.e., selected from the imperial fleet under the command of its officers), which were very often manned by

<sup>116</sup>This type of warship was in fact a little version of the dromon and had only one bank of oars and one mast with a lateen sail. Due to the smaller displacement and leaner hull, which probably was not even fully decked, the galley was very fast and, therefore, suitable for patrolling and reconnaissance tasks, or for quick transfer of orders and/or dispatches. Given that the rowers were not protected by the deck, this type of warship was not expected to participate in the classic naval battle. Pryor, “Dromōn,” 102, 105–106; Hocker, “Fleets,” 95; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 190, 284. Galleys further developed in the late eleventh century and gradually technologically surpassed the dromons and became the archetypal warships of the Mediterranean until the eighteenth century (in the Ottoman navy, individual galleys served well until the nineteenth century when their deployment was finally discontinued).

<sup>117</sup>Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 155; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 99.

<sup>118</sup>See text below.

<sup>119</sup>Haldon, “Approaches,” 66; Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 41–42.

<sup>120</sup>Marcin Böhme, *Flota i polityka morska Alekszego I Komnena* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Avalon, 2012), 96.

<sup>121</sup>For the division, see text below.

<sup>122</sup>Kühn, *Armee*, 68.

<sup>123</sup>Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 154–155, 159; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 90. For example, the fleet of *thema tōn Kibyrrhaiōtōn* (south coast of Asia Minor with the center on the Rhodes Island, see Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 97) is mentioned explicitly for the last time in connection with the Rus’ attack on Constantinople in 1043. It was commanded by *stratēgos* Constantine Kaballourios. In the defensive battle against the Rus’, this fleet suffered both heavy human and material loss (out of a total of twenty-four ships, eleven were captured or sank), which apparently contributed in a significant way to its subsequent rapid decline. Skylitzes, 432–433; Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 286.

foreign mercenaries, mainly the Varangians<sup>124</sup> and the Rus'.<sup>125</sup> However, unlike in the army, the decline was, to a large extent, detrimental also to the imperial fleet, mainly because of the erratic military policy of the emperors who ascended to the throne after the demise of the Makedonian dynasty (1056).<sup>126</sup> Constant and often contradictory changes had far more damaging impact on the navy (compared to the army), as warfleet, the most technical arm of the Byzantine military forces, required almost constant attention (construction of new and maintenance of existing warships,<sup>127</sup> upkeep and financing of key port facilities and arsenals and remaining infrastructure, etc.).<sup>128</sup> Further major blow to the successful survival of the imperial fleet was the fire of the arsenal located in its naval base in Neorion in 1040,<sup>129</sup> which destroyed a large part of this facility, as well as all the dromons with their entire equipment moored there at the time.<sup>130</sup> This loss was never fully recovered.

### 2.2.2 *Units and Command Structure*

During the eleventh century, the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine navy was usually the commander of the imperial fleet at Constantinople (*basilikon ploimon/basilikos stolos*) known under the official title as the

<sup>124</sup>The most famous of these Varangians was the Danish King Harald Hardrada (1046–1066). A vivid description of his service in the ranks of the Byzantine Navy between 1034 and 1043 can be found in the cycles of the Viking sagas *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*. See also Blöndal, *Varangians*, 54–102.

<sup>125</sup>Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 156.

<sup>126</sup>Böhm, *Flota*, 92 ff.

<sup>127</sup>The lifetime of wooden hulls of Byzantine warships is estimated at a maximum of twenty-five years. Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 161.

<sup>128</sup>Even nowadays, there are only a few states besides the United States of America that are real naval powers or have a battle-worthy navy, precisely for the reasons mentioned above. For the need of a continuous active interest in the navy, see also Kekaumenos, 268–273.

<sup>129</sup>The Neorion Harbor was located at the mouth of the Golden Horn on the northern side of Constantinople approximately in the area of today's Istanbul districts of Eminönü and Sirkeci. It originally served as a shipyard for the construction of warships and production of oars. Since the reign of Leo III (717–741), it became the main base of the Constantinopolitan fleet. For more see Raymond Janin, *Constantinople byzantine: Développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1964), 235–236; Ewald Kislinger, "Neorion und Prosfhorion – die alten Häfen am Goldenen Horn," *Die byzantinischen Häfen Konstantinopels*, 91–97.

<sup>130</sup>Skylitzes, 411; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 100. Theotokis erroneously puts this event to 1035.

*drungarios tōn ploimōn* or *droungarios tou stolou*,<sup>131</sup> who had at his disposal several deputies (*topotērētai*).<sup>132</sup> Since, in view of the Byzantines, the Constantinopolitan central fleet actually counted among the *tagmata*, it had a similar structure to the ground *tagmata*. Each deputy (*topotērētēs*) commanded several squadrons (*banda*),<sup>133</sup> whereas the commander of a squadron, having usually three to five dromons operating together in his responsibility, was the *komēs tou stolou*.<sup>134</sup> Each dromon and its crew (*ousia*)<sup>135</sup> were commanded by a *kentarchos*, also referred to as a *nauarchos/ploiarchos*.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, the crew of each ship included two deputy commanders *prōtokaraboi*,<sup>137</sup> a flag officer (*bandoforos*), a commander of the detachment of “marine corps”<sup>138</sup> deployed on the prow (*prōreus*), as well as a drummer (*boukinatōr*), who by sounding the drum in regular intervals indicated the rhythm to the oarsmen (*kōpēlatai*).<sup>139</sup> In the case the ship was equipped with Greek fire, it was operated by a small crew headed by a *siphōnarios*.<sup>140</sup> Signaling officers (*mandatores*) were also

<sup>131</sup> Rodolphe Guillard, “Études de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines: Les chefs de la marine byzantine: drongaire de la flotte, grand drongaire de la flotte, duc de la flotte, mégaduc,” *Byz. Zeitsch.* 44 (1951): 212–240; Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 93; Oikonomides, “Evolution,” 146; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 152; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, 136; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 266, 494–495; D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 28. Basically, this commanding post corresponds to the rank of an admiral.

<sup>132</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 159. *Τοποτηρητές* in this context equals to the rank of a vice-admiral.

<sup>133</sup> D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 29.

<sup>134</sup> Kühn, *Armee*, 68; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 269. In today’s notion, this rank would correspond to that of a commodore.

<sup>135</sup> In total, a typical Byzantine dromon crew (*ousia*) consisted of 120–150 sailors, but the exact number depended on the size of the particular vessel, as not all the warships were of the same dimensions. Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 256, 260.

<sup>136</sup> Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 60–61; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 268–269; D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 29. De facto the captain of the ship.

<sup>137</sup> Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 61; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 270.

<sup>138</sup> Marine corps (*polemistai/stratiotai*) consisted of soldiers (*kontaratoi*) and archers (*toxotai*). Oikonomides, “Evolution,” 146. Apparently, they were sailors who operated the top row of oars, that is, aboard the ship. In combat, they were expected to cease rowing, which, however, did not matter, because the movement and maneuver of the ship during the battle was provided by the sailors operating the lower row of oars below the deck. Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 261–262, 274.

<sup>139</sup> D’Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 29–30; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 272–273.

<sup>140</sup> Kostam, *Warship*, 48.



present on each ship giving combat signals. There was also a ship carpenter (*naupēgos*) aboard responsible for repairs and maintenance of the hull.<sup>141</sup> Besides the central fleet, there was also a private imperial squadron in the service of Byzantine emperors consisting of several warships, called *basilikon dromōnion*.<sup>142</sup> It was headed by an officer entitled *prōtopatharios tēs fialēs* who had two deputies (*prōtokaraboi*) at hand.<sup>143</sup> These ships were not an integral part of the Byzantine navy, and their role was to accompany the imperial dromon (*basilikon dromōn*)<sup>144</sup> when the emperor sailed aboard the ship.<sup>145</sup> Their crews were mostly made up of foreign mercenaries (the Varangians, the Italians, or the Slavs/Rus').<sup>146</sup>

Apart from the imperial warfleet stationed in Constantinople, there were also local provincial fleets (*loipoi ploimoi*), the other designation of which (*thematikon ploimon*) shows that, within the Byzantine armed forces, they were deemed to belong to the *themata*. Provincial fleets were usually headed by the *stratēgoi*.<sup>147</sup> Since they seem to have operated only

<sup>141</sup> D'Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 30.

<sup>142</sup> It was established during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 157; D'Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 32. Alexandrís explains the naming *basilikon dromōnion* as the introduction of smaller versions of dromons (*dromōnion*), intended solely for the personal use of the emperor and his dignitaries. Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 68.

<sup>143</sup> D'Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 32–33; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 271. The term *prōtopatharios tēs fialēs* probably refers to an alternative naming *fialē* (which means *bowl* in English, so the port apparently had the shape of a round flat bowl) of the famous imperial harbor at the Boukoleon Palace lying in the southeastern part of Constantinople on the Sea of Marmara shore, where mostly ships of the personal imperial squadron were moored. Dominik Heher, "Der Palasthafen des Bukoleon," *Die byzantinischen Häfen Konstantinopels*, 70. For the harbor of Boukoleon, see also Janin, *Constantinople*, 234. This officer had, among other things, judicial powers not only over members of the imperial squadron, but also over the entire Constantinopolitan fleet. However, he mostly carried them out without acquiring any formal legal training. Andréas E. Gkioutzioukóstas, *Η απονομή δικαιοσύνης στο Βυζάντιο (9<sup>ος</sup>-12<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας). Τα κοσμικά δικαιοδοτικά όργανα και δικαστήρια της πρωτεύουσας* (Thessalonica, 2004), 116–117.

<sup>144</sup> In fact, there were two of these specially adapted vessels intended for the personal use of the emperor. D'Amato and Rava, *Guardsmen*, 32.

<sup>145</sup> Unlike other parts of the Byzantine navy, *dromōnion* did not suffer any of the aforementioned decline during the eleventh century, precisely because of the close connection of this unit to individual emperors. During political crises, a fully equipped military vessel in the port ready to sail virtually at any time meant literally the last resort for any emperor in the event of a rebellion or a military coup against his person. Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 158.

<sup>146</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 158; Böhm, *Flota*, 80.

<sup>147</sup> Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 95; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 266.

until the mid-eleventh century (their demise was definite by 1081),<sup>148</sup> there is no need to mention their internal structure in further detail.<sup>149</sup> Yet, primary sources clearly show that important ports—maritime trade centers and strategic transport hubs—still maintained and deployed smaller types of warships, the construction of which was often financed by local noblemen.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, in the event of an emergency, civilian vessels (fishing boats, supply and merchant ships) could be confiscated, modified, and pressed into military service.<sup>151</sup>

### 2.3 BATTLE OF MANZIKERT AND ITS MILITARY IMPACT

The battle of Manzikert, which took place on 26 August 1071 in the vicinity of the present-day town of Malazgirt located near Lake Van, Turkey, was fought between the Byzantine army led by the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes and the Seljuk host commanded by the sultan Alp Arslan (1063–1072). Without doubt it was a crucial turning point for the further development of the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century, as well as the fate of its army and navy.<sup>152</sup> The Byzantines were defeated, and the emperor was captured by the Seljuk Turks. Although the sultan eventually released him from captivity after seven days, there was a coup in Constantinople in the meantime, thanks to which Michael VII Doukas was installed to the throne.<sup>153</sup> As a result, chaotic civil war broke out, ending with the defeat, capturing, blinding, and subsequent violent death of Romanos Diogenes on 4 August 1072.<sup>154</sup> This brief, though destructive, civil conflict undermined the military position of the Byzantine Empire

<sup>148</sup> See text above and note 123. See also Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 88; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, 138.

<sup>149</sup> For a description of the organization of the Byzantine navy from the seventh to tenth centuries, when it consisted only of the *themata* and the central imperial fleet in Constantinople, see Hocker, “Fleets,” 93–94; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 266–268.

<sup>150</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 162. See also text below.

<sup>151</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 100; Alexandris, *Δύναμις*, 74. This process was known to the Byzantines as *exelasis emporoutikōn ploioōn*. Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 155.

<sup>152</sup> For descriptions of the battle of Manzikert, see Attaleiates, 160–164; Bryennios, 113–119; John Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars* (Stroud: Tempus, 2000), 112–127; Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 59–86; etc.

<sup>153</sup> Attaleiates, 168–169; Bryennios, 121; Aikaterína Christofilopoulou, *Βυζαντινή ιστορία Β' 2867-1081* (Thessalonica, 1997), 246–247.

<sup>154</sup> Attaleiates, 179; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρευση Β'*, 484; Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History* (London: Longman, 1997), 116.

even more than the defeat at Manzikert. Instead of concentrating on the Seljuk advance in Asia Minor, the Byzantines turned their full attention to internal political affairs. This temporary weakness represented a window of opportunity for various nomadic groups of Seljuk Turks to settle in the interior of Asia Minor, the landscape of which was the most suitable for their way of life. In the same year as the battle of Manzikert took place, another no less important event occurred in the West. On 16 April 1071, the last Byzantine stronghold in southern Italy—the port of Bari—fell into the hands of the Normans led by the ambitious duke of Apulia and Calabria Robert of Hauteville, better known under his nickname Guiscard.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the process of domination of the entire south of the peninsula by the Normans came to its close.<sup>156</sup> Although the loss of Italian territories did not have any impact on the development of the Byzantine army (such as the battle of Manzikert), it nevertheless significantly changed the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean Sea and gave birth to a new and formidable adversary of the declining Byzantine navy—the south Italian Norman navy.<sup>157</sup>

### 2.3.1 *Impact of Manzikert on the Byzantine Army*

The battle of Manzikert and the ensuing civil war had a strong and lasting impact on the further development of the Byzantine army and essentially determined its size and structure at the beginning of Alexios Komnenos' reign. In the period before Manzikert, the transformation of the Byzantine army (from the *themata* to the *tagmata* type) had been almost finished. The irreversible nature of this change is reflected in the well-known and widely discussed attempt of Romanos IV Diogenes in 1068 to re-activate, after many decades of complete neglect, soldiers of the former Anatolian

<sup>155</sup> Gaufredo Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardii ducis fratris eius*, RISS V, ed. by L. A. Muratori (Milan, 1724), 573; Ioannes E. Karagiannópoulos, *To Βυζαντινό κράτος* (Thessalonica: Ekdoseis Vanias, 2001), 195; William B. McQueen, "Relations between the Normans and Byzantium 1071–1112," *Byzantion* 56 (1986): 428; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 117–118.

<sup>156</sup> Ferdinand Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile*, vol. I (Paris: A. Picard, 1907), 190; Peter Charanis, "Byzantium, the West and the Origin of the First Crusade," *Byzantion* 19 (1949): 17.

<sup>157</sup> The first clashes between the Byzantine and the Norman navy occurred in connection with the siege of Bari. Gaufredo Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 573. For the first Norman naval operations after 1061 up to the fall of Bari to Norman hands, see Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 126–127; Stanton, Charles D., *Norman Naval Operations in the Mediterranean* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 34–44.

*themata*.<sup>158</sup> Again, it should be stressed that the army composed entirely of professionals (whether of domestic or foreign origin) serving as mercenaries did not necessarily mean at that time that it was less reliable or less battle-worthy than the original *themata*. What caused much of the Byzantine army to collapse between 1071 and 1081 was primarily the direct military impact of Manzikert and the subsequent civil war<sup>159</sup> (i.e., a significant material and human loss within the ranks of the army), as well as the steep decline in morale of Romanos Diogenes' supporters after his tragic death,<sup>160</sup> the upheaval caused by the Seljuk raids in Asia Minor, and, finally, the uprising of the Norman mercenary Roussel of Bailleul (1073–1075/1076).<sup>161</sup> This increasing state of chaos was not only of military nature. It was mainly because of the economic impact caused by the sudden and complete loss of large stretches of land in Asia Minor and the end of effective political control of the emperor Michael VII Doukas over these areas that the Byzantine administration was unable to maintain individual *tagmata* in the remaining Anatolian provinces, as well as to sustain, not to mention step up, their combat capabilities.

Given the exceptional importance of the defeat at Manzikert, already assigned to it by its contemporaries, as well as by the numerous written sources describing this fateful encounter, it is possible to envision, to a certain extent, the composition and size of the Byzantine army or its particular field units in 1071. The current state of research has not made it possible yet to identify all formations, and especially what military historians would be most interested in—their numerical strength. It also needs to be considered that the emperor Romanos Diogenes naturally did not mobilize the entire Byzantine army for the expedition against the Seljuks, but only a significant part of it, consisting mainly of regiments gathered largely from the eastern part of the Byzantine Empire, with several units hailing from the western half of the realm.<sup>162</sup> Native units (*rōmaika*

<sup>158</sup> Attaleiates, 103–104; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 678; Treadgold, *Army*, 85.

<sup>159</sup> For a brief description of the civil war, see Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 477–485.

<sup>160</sup> Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, p. 484.

<sup>161</sup> For a brief description, see Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 522–524; Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*. See also text below.

<sup>162</sup> In addition to the contingents involved in this campaign, there were also units that, at the same time, protected other sections of the eastern border of the Byzantine Empire, serving as garrisons of many key posts and fortresses. The same applies to the Balkans, where Romanos Diogenes had to station adequate forces in case of a Norman attack, as they conquered Bari in April 1071 and could possibly take advantage of the Byzantines being busy with the fight against Seljuks. Another potential source of threat to the Byzantine power in the Balkans was Hungary. Haldon, *Wars*, 115; Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 39; Cheynet, "Manzikert: un désastre militaire?" *Byzantion* 50 (1980): 421.

*tagmata*) included the elite *tagmata* from the capital, known as the *Scholai* and the *Stratelatai*,<sup>163</sup> then *tagmata* from the provinces of Kappadokia,<sup>164</sup> Charsianon,<sup>165</sup> Anatolikon,<sup>166</sup> Koloneia and Chaldia,<sup>167</sup> Armeniakon,<sup>168</sup> Kilikia, and Bithynia; some reinforcements also came from northern Syria.<sup>169</sup> From the European half of the Empire, there were five Western *tagmata* (*esperia pente tagmata*),<sup>170</sup> plus the *tagma* from the province of Boulgaria.<sup>171</sup> Other units were composed of different groups of foreign mercenaries—the Varangian Guard, the *tagma* of the Rus’,<sup>172</sup> the *tagma* of the Franks (Normans),<sup>173</sup> the *tagma* of the Germans (*Nemitzoi*),<sup>174</sup> the

<sup>163</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 117; Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 40. There is very little direct information about the *Stratelatai*, as it appears in the written sources only in this period. It is believed that it was an elite cavalry unit similar to the *Scholai*. See Kühn, *Armee*, 247–249; Ahrweiler, “Recherches,” 26.

<sup>164</sup> Attaleiates, 162; Haldon, *Wars*, 116; Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 40; Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 425. Tsangás estimates its numerical strength at 6000 soldiers, see Níkos Tsangás, *Μαντζικέρτ, η αρχή του τέλους του μεσαιωνικού ελληνισμού* (Athens: Ekdóseis Gkivósti, 2012), 194. The province of Kappadokia had been part of the *thema* Anatolikon until the beginning of the ninth century, see Leveniótis, *Κατάρρευση Β’*, 455.

<sup>165</sup> Kühn, *Armee*, 256. The province of Charsianon originally belonged to the *thema* Armeniakon. For its historical fate during the eleventh century, see Leveniótis, *Κατάρρευση Β’*, 435–448.

<sup>166</sup> Since the 1040s, this collective designation covers two independent units known as *tagma Lykaonōn* and *tagma Pisidōn*, see Kühn, *Armee*, 252–253.

<sup>167</sup> *Koloneiatai* and *Chaldaioi* formed a *tagma* collecting recruits from the province of Chaldia, see Kühn, *Armee*, 257.

<sup>168</sup> Kühn, *Armee*, 255–256.

<sup>169</sup> Bryennios, 107; Haldon, *Wars*, 116–117; Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 422.

<sup>170</sup> What “*esperia pente tagmata*” refers to is still under discussion. According to Treadgold, it includes elite *tagmata* of the *Scholai*, the *Exkoubitai*, the *Bigla*, the *Hikanatoi*, and the *Athاناتοι*, see Treadgold, *Army*, 85. However, this conclusion cannot be readily accepted, because, as seen above, the *Scholai*, the *Exkoubitai*, the *Hikanatoi*, and the *Bigla* were collectively referred to as the *basilika tagmata*. Kühn argues that this collective term refers to the Varangians, the Franks (Normans), and a regiment known as the *Maniakatoi* (*Latinoi*) composed also essentially of Norman, or western knights who initially served under the general Georgios Maniakes in southern Italy and Sicily in the 1040s, and even after his death maintained their organizational structure and became a stable part of the Byzantine army, see Kühn, *Armee*, 258. Haldon leaves the question of their composition open but estimates their numerical strength at 5000 men (1000 men per *tagma*), see Haldon, *Wars*, 116. It can be assumed that *esperia pente tagmata* were the *tagmata* from Makedonia, Thrace, Thessalonica, Dyrrachion, plus the Normans from the unit of the *Maniakatoi* (*Latinoi*). Cheynet estimates the total numerical force of all the western *tagmata* at 15,000 men, see Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 426.

<sup>171</sup> Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 40.

<sup>172</sup> Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 423.

<sup>173</sup> Attaleiates, 148; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 144.

<sup>174</sup> Attaleiates, 147; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 144; Nicolle and Hook, *Mantzikert*, 40.

*Hetaireiai*,<sup>175</sup> the Armenian infantry,<sup>176</sup> the Oghuz Turks (the Uzes),<sup>177</sup> and the Pechenegs (referred to as the Scythians).<sup>178</sup> The numerical strength of this expeditionary army is very difficult to estimate, but current researchers agree that it did not exceed 40,000 men.<sup>179</sup> The losses suffered by the Byzantines in the battle are estimated at approximately 10%,<sup>180</sup> but it needs to be considered that not all units suffered similar loss ratio. Western *tagmata* survived the battle virtually unscathed—for example, the *Hetaireiai*, who, as part of the rearguard, practically did not even intervene in the fighting,<sup>181</sup> as well as the *tagma* from Kappadokia, which withdrew with very light casualties. Also, the contingents under the command of *magistros* Joseph Tarchaneiotos (or Trachaneiotos) sent by Romanos Diogenes toward the city of Chliat (today Ahlat, Turkey) before the battle itself did not suffer any losses because they did not take part in the main encounter at Manzikert.<sup>182</sup> The greatest casualties seem to have been incurred by the infantry<sup>183</sup> and by the units fighting in the center of the Byzantine battle formation close to the emperor, that is, mainly the emperor's guard units, the *Stratelatai* and the *Scholai*.<sup>184</sup> This said, from a military point of view, the defeat at Manzikert did not mean any fatal weakening or collapse of the entire Byzantine army.<sup>185</sup>

This conclusion is also evident from the course of the civil war that ensued during which Romanos Diogenes tried to reclaim the imperial

<sup>175</sup> Bryennios, 115; Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 40.

<sup>176</sup> Attaleiates, 151.

<sup>177</sup> Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 144, 147; Cheynet, "Manzikert," 424.

<sup>178</sup> Attaleiates, 156–157; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 147; Haldon, *Wars*, 116–117; Cheynet, "Manzikert," 422–423.

<sup>179</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 44. However, approximately 20,000 servants who took care of military supplies, food, baggage, tents and other heavy items, and pack animals still need to be added to this number. See Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 40; Cheynet, "Manzikert," 426.

<sup>180</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 126; Cheynet, "Manzikert," 431.

<sup>181</sup> Cheynet, "Manzikert," 428.

<sup>182</sup> This was a large part of Byzantine forces, which included, among others, the Varangians and part of the Armenian troops, and probably accounted for half of the entire Byzantine army. In addition, the Norman mercenaries under the command of Roussel of Bailleul and the Pechenegs also advanced toward Chliat. Cheynet, "Manzikert," 422–423. These units gave way to Seljuk pressure, and veered first to the south and then to the west, reaching the town of Melitene (now Malatya). Thus, their losses were minimal. Nicolle and Hook, *Manzikert*, 41, 56.

<sup>183</sup> In particular, by the Armenian infantry, because its foot soldiers could not retreat from the battlefield as quickly as the cavalry units, see Cheynet, "Manzikert," 431.

<sup>184</sup> Cheynet, "Manzikert," 428.

<sup>185</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 46; Cheynet, "Manzikert," 429–432.

throne. In this conflict, only *tagmata* from the eastern part of the Empire took active part, consisting more or less of the same units that were present at Manzikert,<sup>186</sup> except for the *tagma* from Kappadokia, soldiers from Kilikia, and the Armenian infantry, who had pledged allegiance to Romanos Diogenes. The rest of the eastern *tagmata*,<sup>187</sup> together with the elite *tagmata* from the capital and the Norman mercenaries led by Robert Crispin, chose to support the new regime of Michael VII Doukas.<sup>188</sup> This army was first commanded by emperor's cousin, *prōtoproedros* Constantine Doukas,<sup>189</sup> and since spring 1072 by his brother, *domestikos* of the East and *prōtoproedros* Andronikos Doukas.<sup>190</sup> The subsequent fighting resulted in relatively high casualties.<sup>191</sup> For instance, the *tagma* from Kappadokia appears to have ceased to exist as a battle-worthy unit,<sup>192</sup> and the same can be assumed for at least a greater part of the Armenian infantry.<sup>193</sup> Collateral “blood-letting” was the result of the ongoing Seljuk pressure, which continued to grow stronger in the years after Manzikert<sup>194</sup> and, in this way, contributed to the gradual disintegration of the Byzantine administration in the territories affected by their recurrent inroads.<sup>195</sup> The military units

<sup>186</sup> Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 429. The western *tagmata* did not join the civil war because of the alleged oath of the *domestikos* of the West, Nikeforos Bryennios, that he would not fight against his close friends. See Attaleiates, 173; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 348.

<sup>187</sup> These were probably *tagmata* from the provinces that Romanos Diogenes could not win over in the autumn of 1071. According to Michael Attaleiates, it was still possible for him at that time to advance as far as Bithynia (to western Asia Minor), where he could have got the backing of units from Isauria, Pisidia, Lykaonia, Paflagonia, and Honorias along the way. Since he did not advance that far, those units later obediently joined the army loyal to Michael VII Doukas. Attaleiates, 173; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 348. Unfortunately, Attaleiates uses old geographical names, making unclear which *tagmata* he exactly means. It can be assumed that these were the same indigenous *tagmata* (from the provinces of Armeniakon and Anatolikon) that took part in the battle of Manzikert, see text and note 169 above.

<sup>188</sup> Most Norman mercenaries first supported Diogenes, but later changed sides. See Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 348–349; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 482.

<sup>189</sup> Attaleiates, 169; Bryennios, 125–127; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 482; Angold, *Empire*, 116.

<sup>190</sup> Attaleiates, 173; Bryennios, 133; Angold, *Empire*, 116; Kühn, *Armee*, 151–152.

<sup>191</sup> Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 433.

<sup>192</sup> See Bryennios, 135, see also note 164.

<sup>193</sup> Cheynet, “Mantzikert,” 433.

<sup>194</sup> Attaleiates, 183. The Seljuks had their hands free, so to speak, because the regime of Michael VII Doukas in Constantinople did not seek, for unknown reasons, to resurrect the treaty concluded between Romanos Diogenes and the Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan in the aftermath of Manzikert. See Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 156; Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 105. The situation was further complicated by the death of the Seljuk sultan in 1072.

<sup>195</sup> At the same time, the nature of the Turkish raids changed after the battle of Manzikert, as the nomads began to settle directly on the Byzantine territory. In other words, the Seljuk temporary presence was turning into the permanent one. See Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 484.

stationed in those areas were either destroyed or weakened by the Seljuks, or their loyalty to the central government in Constantinople disappeared as a result of reports of the cruel fate of Romanos Diogenes or because they did not receive cash payments in time due to increasing disruptions of the state apparatus. In such cases, the discontented commanders began to act on their own accord.<sup>196</sup>

The imperial government at Constantinople, represented from now on by the powerful logothete (*logothetēs tou dromou*)<sup>197</sup> eunuch Nikeforitzes,<sup>198</sup> tried to stop this detrimental process at all costs. In order to demonstrate that the government still possessed full control over the development of events, Nikeforitzes organized a new large-scale military expedition against the Seljuks in 1073. The Byzantine army, which apparently consisted of the same units as the year before, was commanded by Isaakios Komnenos, a new *domestikos* of the East appointed by Michael VII Doukas.<sup>199</sup> The new supreme commander of the Byzantine army was the older brother of

<sup>196</sup>This seems to have been the case of soldiers from Kappadokia who supported Romanos Diogenes, but after his violent death completely lost motivation to serve his executioners, see Leveniôtis, *Katárrevesh* Β', 484–485. The most visible case of resistance to the imperial government is the rebellion of Roussel of Bailleul. Other commanders ignoring the instructions from the capital were, for example, Filaretos Brachamios and Basileios Apokapes. They both remained loyal to the deposed Romanos Diogenes, refused to acknowledge the new regime of the Doukai, and together with troops under their command established independent Byzantine enclaves along the eastern border in Kilikia and in the area of the upper Euphrates and in northern Syria. See Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 398; Warren Treadgold, *A History of Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 605–606. It must also be considered that their Armenian origin may have also played the role in their undertakings, as well as the fact that there was a very strong Armenian element in these border areas. See, for example, Werner Seibt, "Stärken und Schwächen der Byzantinischen Integrationspolitik gegenüber den neuen Armenischen Staatsbürgern im 11. Jahrhundert," *Η αυτοκρατορία σε κρίση* (;) *Το Βυζάντιο τον 11<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα (1025–1081)*, 331–347.

<sup>197</sup>*Logothetēs tou dromou* was a senior official at the ministry (*logothesion*) managing imperial post service (*dromos*), who was also responsible for the provision of communications and all diplomatic or covert activities, which was a post corresponding to today's secretary of state.

<sup>198</sup>Nikeforitzes came from the province of Boukellarion in Asia Minor. He joined the state apparatus in Constantinople during the reign of Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067) and since then gradually rose in the bureaucratic hierarchy. However, due to his scrupulous practices and intrigues, he fell into Romanos IV Diogenes' disfavor and was sent to exile. Michael VII Doukas called him back to the imperial court through the mediation of his uncle, *kaisar* John Doukas. In early 1073, Nikeforitzes was appointed to the above-mentioned post, which made him the most important official in the realm. For more details about his career and origin, see Attaleiates, 180–181; Bryennios, 143–145; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 155; Leveniôtis, *Κίνημα*, 116–118; Angold, *Empire*, 121.

<sup>199</sup>Bryennios, 147; Leveniôtis, *Κίνημα*, 105; Angold, *Empire*, 116. For Isaakios Komnenos, see text below.



Alexios Komnenos.<sup>200</sup> The most battle-worthy unit among the assembled troops under his command was the *tagma* of the Norman mercenaries consisting of 400 men.<sup>201</sup> It was led by a Manzikert veteran, *bestēs* Roussel (or Oursel) of Bailleul,<sup>202</sup> who, due to his ample combat experience, was appointed as the second-in-command of the still relatively inexperienced Isaakios Komnenos. On their way to the East, an argument soon flared up between the two, and as a result, Roussel of Bailleul and all the Norman mercenaries under his command opted to withdraw from the ranks of the expeditionary army. Regardless of this incident, Isaakios Komnenos pressed on with his advance against the Seljuks with the remaining units only to be ambushed and defeated near the town of Kaisareia (today's Kayseri, Turkey) in Kappadokia, resulting in further significant Byzantine losses.<sup>203</sup> Meanwhile, Roussel of Bailleul reached the province of Armeniakon, where, during the winter of 1073/1074, he began, with the assistance of other Norman mercenaries already stationed there,<sup>204</sup> to create his own independent enclave with the center in the town of Amaseia.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>200</sup> See text below. Young Alexios Komnenos also took part in this campaign. Bryennios, 147; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 485.

<sup>201</sup> Cheynet, "Effectifs," 323.

<sup>202</sup> Attaleiates, 183; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 157; Angold, *Empire*, 116. For the career of this successful mercenary commander prior to the battle of Manzikert, see Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 74–92; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 522.

<sup>203</sup> Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 486. However, it is not possible to quantify the casualties suffered by the Byzantines in absolute numbers. The chronicle of Michael Attaleiates states only that many Byzantines died or were captured by the Turks and that most of the troops was saved, thanks to timely flee from the battlefield. See Attaleiates, 184. Isaakios Komnenos was among the Byzantine commanders who fell into captivity, but later managed to pay ransom and returned to Constantinople. From 1074 to 1078, he was appointed as the governor (*doux*) of Antioch. See Bryennios, 157; Basiles Skoulatos, *Les personnages byzantins de l'Alexiade, analyse prosopographique de synthèse* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1980), 125. At the same time, the fact that the army led by Isaakios Komnenos was the last Byzantine army to ever operate on the territory of the province of Kappadokia further signifies the gradual deterioration of the situation in Asia Minor. See Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 115.

<sup>204</sup> For the settlement of Norman mercenaries in the strategically important territory of Armeniakon since the mid-eleventh century, see Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 70–73; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 521–522.

<sup>205</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 116. It is estimated that there were between 2700 and 3000 men gathered under his command, mostly Norman mercenaries who deserted from the Byzantine army and joined Roussel of Bailleul's cause. Attaleiates, 188–189; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 158, 161; Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 134; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Β' 2*, 249.

The uprising of Roussel of Bailleul in the strategic territory of the province of Armeniakon greatly complicated the ability of the imperial government to organize and conduct effective defense against Seljuks inroads. Norman enclave represented a roadblock which virtually prevented reinforcements to be sent to the still Byzantine territories lying further east (or toward Kilikia and the city of Antioch in northern Syria). From now on, the local military garrisons serving on the most remote sections of the eastern border had to rely only on themselves.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, after the news of the rebellion of Roussel of Bailleul started to spread, almost all the Norman *tagmata* sided with the insurgent commander. This resulted in further decrease not only in the numerical strength of the Byzantine army, but also in significant reduction in its battle effectiveness, as the Norman mercenary units had been deemed its most combat-worthy component.<sup>207</sup> Creation of an independent Norman principality in Asia Minor could also cause “international” complications, as reinforcements could have been sent there from the Normans in southern Italy, which might have had catastrophic consequences. Therefore, the effort of pushing the Seljuks out of Asia Minor was entirely abandoned, and the priority of the imperial government now was to crush the Norman insurgents in Armeniakon. This all-important task fell to the emperor’s uncle, *kaisar* John Doukas, as he was put in charge of the military expedition against Roussel of Bailleul in the spring of 1074.<sup>208</sup> He was accompanied by his son Andronikos, who, after the dismissal of Isaakios Komnenos in the aftermath of his unsuccessful campaign against the Seljuks, was reinstated as the *domestikos* of the East. The Byzantine army comprised the Varangian Guard, the *tagma* of the Norman knights, as well as several Byzantine *tagmata*, probably from the provinces of Anatolikon and Thrakesion.<sup>209</sup> It is clear from the above that the military forces entrusted to *kaisar* John Doukas were

<sup>206</sup> Leveniôtis, *Katárpepsi* B’, 486, 524.

<sup>207</sup> Norman heavy cavalry played a crucial role in several engagements. For example, in 1072, the Normans led by Robert Crispin decisively contributed to the defeat of Romanos Diogenes near the town of Adana (today’s Seyhan, Turkey). Tsangás, *Μαντζικέρτ*, 205. For a growing number of Normans under the command of Roussel of Bailleul, see note 205.

<sup>208</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 117.

<sup>209</sup> In accordance with the archaizing tendencies, Nikeforos Bryennios in his chronicle speaks of the Frygians, the Lykaonians (from the province of *Anatolikōn*), and the Asians (from the province of *Thrakēsion*). Bryennios, 169; Leveniôtis, *Κίνημα*, 125–126. In fact, the Frygians are little later known primarily as mercenaries from the town of Choma (*Chōmatēnoi*), with the help of which another insurgent military commander, Nikeforos Botaneiates, was able to ascend to the imperial throne in 1078. Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 324.

not as numerous as the field armies sent to Asia Minor in previous years. The resulting fierce battle, which eventually took place on the banks of the Sangarios River (near the Zompos Bridge) on the border between the provinces of Anatolikon and Kappadokia,<sup>210</sup> ended in the defeat of the larger imperial army. John Doukas was captured by the Norman rebels, and Andronikos Doukas was severely wounded.<sup>211</sup> The imperial field army was completely routed, and the only unit that eventually retreated from the battlefield practically unscathed and still as a cohesive military unit was the *tagma* from the province of Anatolikon.<sup>212</sup>

After the disaster of this ill-fated campaign, the emperor Michael VII Doukas de facto no longer had any battle-worthy *tagmata* in Asia Minor available.<sup>213</sup> The period from 1071 to 1074, full of recurrent and costly military defeats paired with the increasing inability of the imperial government to regain control over home areas of the eastern *tagmata*, from where fresh levies could be recruited to restore their fighting capability, contributed to the gradual disintegration of *tagmata*-type units.<sup>214</sup> Desperate Nikeforitzes sought to avoid the worst-case scenario by creating new units in order to replace those destroyed. For instance, in 1075, he re-established the aforementioned elite *tagma* of the Immortals (*Athanatoi*), into which any refugee from Asia Minor with military experience was recruited.<sup>215</sup> Another stopgap measure was the acquisition of as many mercenaries from abroad as possible. The most significant attempt in this respect was the effort to recruit 6000 mercenaries from Alania (an

<sup>210</sup> Attaleiates, 184. It should be noted here that the battle at the Sangarios River was the last significant battle in the interior of Asia Minor until the arrival of the First Crusade. For more details, see Leveniôtis, *Κίνημα*, 122, 128–129. At the same time, this is the last mention of the province of Kappadokia as a Byzantine territory in the chronicle of Michael Attaleiates. See Leveniôtis, *Κατάρρηση Β'*, 486.

<sup>211</sup> Bryennios, 171, 173, 209. Andronikos Doukas succumbed to his injuries several months later.

<sup>212</sup> This unit was expertly led by *kouropalātēs* Nikeforos Botaneiates, who was the military commander of the province of *Anatolikōn*. See Bryennios, 237.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 265; Leveniôtis, *Κίνημα*, 138–139.

<sup>214</sup> Leveniôtis, *Κίνημα*, 132.

<sup>215</sup> Attaleiates, 243; Bryennios, 265; Angold, *Empire*, 123; Treadgold, *State*, 607. These refugees could very well have been former soldiers of the scattered Anatolian *tagmata*. However, apart from a brief deployment in 1080 under Nikeforos III Botaneiates, the resurrected elite unit of the *Athanatoi* never again operated in Asia Minor. Nevertheless, it can still be considered one of the surviving units of the eastern half of the Byzantine Empire. See text below.

area in present-day Georgia), which, however, did not lead to any tangible results due to the acute and more and more noticeable lack of funds in this period.<sup>216</sup> Despite their recent negative experience with the Norman mercenary commander, Roussel of Bailleul, the Byzantines intensified their efforts to hire more Norman mercenaries. In order to speed up this process, Michael VII Doukas sought to conclude an alliance directly with the recent Byzantine arch-enemy in southern Italy, Robert Guiscard.<sup>217</sup> As all other sources of manforce seemed to have run out, the imperial government even turned to recruiting the Seljuk Turks as mercenaries.<sup>218</sup>

The complete disintegration of *tagmata* in Asia Minor within a few years immediately after the battle of Manzikert is related to the three following events and methods of dealing with them. The first encompasses the repeated efforts of the imperial government between 1075 and 1076 to suppress the uprising of Roussel of Bailleul in the province of Armeniakon, whereas the other two are successive contests for the imperial throne, which started in the remaining Asian Minor territories still under Byzantine control at the time—the rebellion of Nikeforos Botaneiates against Michael VII Doukas in 1077<sup>219</sup> and the revolt of *magistros* and *bestarchēs* Nikeforos Melissenos against Nikeforos III Botaneiates

<sup>216</sup>Bryennios, 183. Because of dire financial situation, only 150 Alan mercenaries were hired and later joined the personal guard of Alexios Komnenos (Bryennios, 185). What is interesting is the number the emperor originally planned to recruit, which is strikingly reminiscent of the number of the Varangians sent by the ruler of the Kievan Rus' Vladimir to Basileios II in 988. Did Nikeforitzes knowingly try to imitate the last-minute measure that ultimately saved Basileios II? See Cheynet, "Effectifs," 323.

<sup>217</sup>The conclusion of this treaty was to be sealed by the marriage of emperor's son Constantine and Guiscard's daughter Olympias. See Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 167, 170; Helene Bibicou, "Une page d'histoire diplomatique de Byzance au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle: Michel VII Doukas, Robert Guiscard et la pension des dignitaires," *Byzantion* 29–30 (1959–1960): 48; Jonathan Shepard, "Aspects of Byzantine Attitudes and Policy towards the West in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Byz. Forsch.* 13 (1988): 100; McQueen, "Relations," 429–431; Chalandon, *Domination*, 260–264; Angold, *Empire*, 129. See also text below.

<sup>218</sup>Leveniôtis, *Kίνημα*, 132. Romanos Diogenes was already expecting help from Seljuk allies against his rivals in Constantinople at the turn of 1071/1072. Attaleiates, 172; Tsangas, *Μαντζικέρτ*, 205. However, the first large-scale "employers" of Seljuk mercenaries were Michael VII Doukas and Nikeforitzes. Leveniôtis, *Kίνημα*, 144. For example, in 1075, they hired 5000 or 6000 Turks under the leadership of the Seljuk chieftain Artuk, who was sent to defeat Roussel of Bailleul. Nevertheless, this plan misfired in the end. Attaleiates, 189; Leveniôtis, *Kίνημα*, 149–150.

<sup>219</sup>Attaleiates, 241, 263 ff.

in 1080.<sup>220</sup> The suppression of the rebellion of Roussel of Bailleul was the responsibility of Alexios Komnenos (only a *proedros* at the time).<sup>221</sup> In this case it is symptomatic that, compared to previous attempts (e.g., unsuccessful campaign of *kaisar* John Doukas in 1074), Alexios Komnenos received only a handful of soldiers without any financial backing,<sup>222</sup> as the imperial government neither had at its disposal. However, the same dilemma was faced by the two rebels in 1077 and 1080, respectively. Because of the breakup of *tagmata* in Asia Minor (which they would normally use to bolster their military stance *vis à vis* the ruling emperor), they were forced to seek military assistance at various Seljuk chieftains in Asia Minor (namely, the Seljuk princes Maṣṣūr and Süleyman, sons of Kutlumuş)<sup>223</sup> who provided troops for their rebel forces.<sup>224</sup> Only Nikeforos Botaneiates, a former *doux Anatólikōn*, was able (albeit with great difficulty) to levy some indigenous soldiers from this province. The result was a mercenary unit of 300 men<sup>225</sup> known as the *Chōmatēnoi* after the town of Choma in Frygia.<sup>226</sup> Three years later, Nikeforos Melissenos could not find any Byzantine troops to bolster his military entourage, and except for a handful of soldiers obtained by recalling garrisons from Byzantine towns and fortresses in western Asia Minor (Frygia, Bithynia), his rebel army consisted almost exclusively of Seljuk bows-for-hire.<sup>227</sup>

The only essentially intact and battle-worthy part of the Byzantine army during the lackluster reign of Michael VII Doukas was, with the

<sup>220</sup> Bryennios, 301 ff.

<sup>221</sup> *Alexias*, I.1.3. (p. 15); Angold, *Empire*, 117; Treadgold, *State*, 606.

<sup>222</sup> Attaleiates, 199; Bryennios, 187; Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 169. After the defeat of Roussel of Bailleul, the province of Armeniakon was left to its fate, and its territories, with the exception of the Black Sea coast (which remained under the control of the Byzantines), were soon seized by the Turkomans led by the emir Melik Danişmend. Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρηση Β΄*, 524–526.

<sup>223</sup> Turkish chief Kutlumuş ibn Arslan Israil was a cousin of the first Seljuk sultan Tughril Beg (1055–1063), who, after sultan's death, provoked a revolt against his son and successor Alp Arslan (1063–1072). However, in the battle of Damgan, in which his entire rebellion culminated, Kutlumuş was killed, leaving behind four sons, of whom Süleyman (Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş) eventually became the founder of the Rūm (Roman) Sultanate in Asia Minor in 1084. Claude Cahen, *La Turquie pré-ottomane*, *Varia Turcica* 7 (Istanbul: Inst. Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes, 1988), 12–13.

<sup>224</sup> Cahen, *Turquie*, 12–13; Cahen, *Turkey*, 8–9.

<sup>225</sup> Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 323; Leveniōtis, *Κίνημα*, 132; Angold, *Empire*, 119.

<sup>226</sup> Bryennios, 265; *Alexias*, III.9.1. (p. 110); Cheynet, “La résistance aux Turcs en Asie Mineure entre Mantzikert et la première croisade,” in *Εὐψυχία: Mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), 133; Angold, *Empire*, 120.

<sup>227</sup> Bryennios, 301; Cheynet, “Résistance,” 133–147; Frankopan, “Melissenos,” 156, 176.

exception of the *basilika tagmata*,<sup>228</sup> represented by the units from the western part of the Empire (*esperia tagmata*). These formations had been virtually unscathed, as they did not partake in the events taking place in Asia Minor after Manzikert.<sup>229</sup> And it was these units which supported Nikeforos Bryennios (*proedros kai doux Dyrrachiou*) in his attempt to win the imperial throne in 1077/1078.<sup>230</sup> Fortunately, we are fairly well informed about their composition and numerical strength, as a large part of them (ca. 15,000 out of the total estimate of 25,000 men)<sup>231</sup> took part in the battle of Kalavrye in Thrace in 1078.<sup>232</sup> In this encounter, Nikeforos Bryennios' triumphal march toward Constantinople was successfully blocked by the recently appointed *domestikos* of the West, Alexios Komnenos (already awarded with the exalted court title of *nōbelissimos*).<sup>233</sup> The young commander-in-chief had under his command all the troops loyal to Nikeforos III Botaneiates.<sup>234</sup> Indeed, it was a stroke of luck that these last operational units of the "old" Byzantine army avoided by narrow margin mutual destruction in the battle of Kalavrye. Thus, they subsequently became the basis of the renewed Byzantine army with which Alexios Komnenos, after his successful military coup in April 1081,<sup>235</sup> could begin to redress the unfortunate consequences of Manzikert.

### 2.3.2 *Impact of Manzikert on the Byzantine Navy*

As noted above, compared to ground units, where political and military developments after Manzikert had direct negative consequences, the perceptible decline of the Byzantine navy began well before 1071. Paradoxically, the most probable cause of the neglect and gradual decay of the navy had been the permanent state of peace since the mid-1030s in the

<sup>228</sup> See text above.

<sup>229</sup> See text above.

<sup>230</sup> Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 172; Attaleiates, 242–243.

<sup>231</sup> Cheynet, "Effectifs," 330.

<sup>232</sup> Attaleiates, 289–291; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 180–181; Bryennios, 269–279. See also Norman Tobias, "The Tactics and Strategy of Alexius Comnenus at Calavrytae, 1078," *Byzantine Studies* 6 (1979): 193–211.

<sup>233</sup> Attaleiates, 288–289; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 180; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Β' 2*, 255.

<sup>234</sup> For the course of the battle of both adversaries at Kalavrye in 1078, see Bryennios, 265 (units under the command of Alexios Komnenos), 269 (units under the command of Nikeforos Bryennios); *Alexias*, 1.5.2. (p. 20); Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 353; Haldon, *Wars*, 128–129.

<sup>235</sup> See text below.

Mediterranean and Black Sea waters.<sup>236</sup> First signs of this downturn were almost unnoticeable at first and began to manifest themselves only after the situation at sea had finally turned to the detriment of the Byzantines. After 1071, two new threats gradually materialized in the eastern Mediterranean and made the restoration of the combat readiness of the Byzantine navy a matter of utmost urgency. The former was the aforementioned conquest of Bari by the Normans on 16 April 1071.<sup>237</sup> The Norman navy, which had been in the process of formation since the early 1060s, played a major role in the subjugation of this last Byzantine stronghold in Apulia.<sup>238</sup> Its gradual emergence and development were determined by the nature of the territories in southern Italy, as well as by the fact that since May 1061 the Normans had embarked on the conquest of Sicily.<sup>239</sup> This of course would not have been possible without strong naval backing.<sup>240</sup> Thus, Norman navy quickly evolved from humble beginnings into a capable fighting machine, and it was only a matter of time before it started to support further Norman naval operations in the Mediterranean. The latter milestone was the battle of Manzikert itself, or rather the settling of the Seljuks in Asia Minor in its wake. Within a few years after the battle, the Turks reached the shores of the Aegean Sea in the west and the Mediterranean Sea in the south.<sup>241</sup> Seljuks, accustomed to nomadic life in

<sup>236</sup> Böhm, *Flota*, 103. This situation is not typical only of the eleventh century; the decline of the war fleet had occurred regularly during all peace periods in the Byzantine history. Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 161–162. Some members of the Byzantine nobility were also aware of the gradual decline of their state's naval power during this period, as evidenced in some passages of Kekaumenos' *Strategikon*. He went as far as considering the maintenance of a powerful warfleet to be one of the vital duties of any Byzantine emperor. See Kekaumenos, 268–273; Böhm, *Flota*, 82–83.

<sup>237</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 59.

<sup>238</sup> See text above.

<sup>239</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 114. The first undertakings of the Norman fleet were very modest (at the beginning it had only thirteen vessels). In addition to ships of various types and origins, it consisted of several abandoned Byzantine dromons found by the Normans in Apulia and Calabria. Alexandris, *Δύναμις*, 312–313. The ships were manned by local Apulian and Greek sailors, only the soldiers aboard were the Normans. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 126.

<sup>240</sup> The full advantage of its own strong fleet was demonstrated, for example, in the siege and conquest of Palermo in 1072. Alexandris, *Δύναμις*, 313; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 118, 124–125.

<sup>241</sup> A group of Turkish nomads occupied the port of Smyrna in 1075. They were led by enterprising and dynamic emir Çaka, who was about to create a capable pirate fleet that would later become a serious threat to the whole Byzantine Aegean. Alexandris, *Δύναμις*, 306. See also text below.

the Eurasian steppe, initially showed no particular interest in continuing their expansion at sea, but this situation was about to change very soon.<sup>242</sup>

Descriptions of historical events in Byzantine sources relating to the early post-Manzikert period clearly show that the navy never played an active role in the ongoing events. In fact, references in primary sources are so rare and vague that it can be presumed that only a very limited number of ships were still in active service.<sup>243</sup> Under Michael VII Doukas, the Byzantine navy was condemned to a near-total passivity.<sup>244</sup> According to the testimony of Michael Attaleiates, the emperor did not even appoint a new commander-in-chief (*droungarios tōn ploimōn*).<sup>245</sup> Possibly, it is precisely for this reason that the warfleet chose not to support Michael VII Doukas during the rebellion of Nikeforos Botaneiates and happily sided with the rebels.<sup>246</sup> Once Botaneiates was crowned the emperor, he repaid their favor immediately by appointing a new commander-in-chief of the

<sup>242</sup> Böhm, *Flota*, 93.

<sup>243</sup> This means that Byzantine authors do not provide further data on the deployment of the navy, for example, how many ships participated in a particular action and who commanded them. See, for example, Attaleiates, 268, 270–273, 308; Bryennios, 199, 201, 215, 249, 251.

<sup>244</sup> There are two exceptions in this respect known from the written sources. The former is the deployment of vessels from Dyrrachion by Nikeforos Bryennios against the attacking Norman ships (or pirate vessels in the Norman service). Bryennios, 215; Böhm, *Flota*, 97–98. This indicates that the local naval squadron of the province of Dyrrachion survived until at least 1075/1076, when Nikeforos Bryennios was appointed as its military governor (*doux Dyrrachiou*). However, the same text mentions that Bryennios had the ships equipped for this very purpose (*triervis kat' auton exoplisas*), which could mean that he had no warfleet at his disposal when the attacks started and that he was forced to deploy modified civil (merchant, transport) vessels for this purpose. The latter exception is the transfer of Alexios Komnenos from Herakleia Pontike (now Ereğli, Turkey) on the Black Sea coast to Constantinople by ship in 1076. Alexios Komnenos had just managed to capture the rebelling general Roussel of Bailleul, and it was critical for him to return to the Byzantine capital with his captive as quickly and safely as possible. Therefore, a fast ship was sent for him directly from Constantinople. In this case, it was most probably a vessel belonging to the imperial squadron (*basilikon dromōnion*). Bryennios, 199, 201. Two years later it was very likely involved in the power struggle in connection with the 1078 coup of Nikeforos Botaneiates (see note 246). Imperial squadron became visible again in the sources in 1081 when its vessels, under the leadership of an unnamed *spatharios* (*prōtopatharios tēs fialēs*), almost thwarted Alexios Komnenos' coup. Only quick intervention of Georgios Palaiologos saved the day for the Komnenoi. See *Alexias*, II.9.2–6 (p. 82–84); Böhm, *Flota*, 108–110.

<sup>245</sup> Attaleiates, 270–271; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 156; Böhm, *Flota*, 102.

<sup>246</sup> Attaleiates, 268; Bryennios, 251.



imperial navy.<sup>247</sup> The navy then remained strictly loyal to Botaneiates for the rest of his relatively short reign. However, it must be considered what the term “Byzantine navy” actually entailed in this period. Testimonies of Byzantine sources give us a little clue regarding what parts of it were still in existence. In view of previous developments, it was very likely that neither provincial fleets nor ships manned by foreign mercenaries or perhaps even dromons of the Constantinopolitan fleet played any major role. In all the cases above, only several warships, belonging to the imperial squadron (*basilikon dromōnion*)<sup>248</sup> and serving only to the personal needs of the ruling emperor, seem to have been deployed.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, it is more than obvious that, in the decade after Manzikert, the Byzantine navy, with the exception of few ships still operational in Constantinople, almost ceased to exist.<sup>250</sup>

<sup>247</sup> See note 244. In theory, this commander-in-chief could have been a certain *bestarchēs* Constantine, whose seal found in Dristra (!) has been dated to the late eleventh century. See Ivan Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 3, 379–380. If this is confirmed, he could hold this post during the reign of Nikefōros Botaneiates, since after 1081 the youngest brother of Alexios Komnenos, Nikefōros, was appointed to this position. See text below.

<sup>248</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 156. A similar conclusion has been recently reached by Böhm, who, unlike Ahrweiler, also envisages the existence of ships of the central Constantinopolitan fleet. See Böhm, *Flota*, 102, 115.

<sup>249</sup> See text above.

<sup>250</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 179; Pryor and Jefferys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 87; Böhm, *Flota*, 106.



## Alexios I Komnenos

### 3.1 THE ORIGIN OF THE KOMNENOI

Alexios Komnenos was a descendant of a noble family which rose to power due to its loyal service during the reign of Basileios II and became one of the prominent aristocratic families along with the Melissenoi, the Doukai, the Dalassenoi, the Diogenai, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Generally, the Komnenoi came either from the village of Komne in the south of Thrace<sup>2</sup> or from the vicinity of the Byzantine town of Kastamon (now Kastamonu, Turkey), located in Paflagonia in Asia Minor, where, according to period written sources, Alexios' grandfather Manuel Komnenos Erotikos (died ca. 1020) had his aristocratic *oikos*.<sup>3</sup> Manuel's son and Alexios' paternal uncle Isaakios was proclaimed the Byzantine emperor in 1057 after a successful coup

<sup>1</sup>From the beginning, all known male members of this family held military positions. Manuel Komnenos Erotikos, as well as his son Isaakios Komnenos, served as *meġas domestikos* of the East. Alexios Komnenos' father, *kouropalatiēs* John Komnenos, was *meġas domestikos* of the West. See Konstantinos Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 38, 41, 49; Kühn, *Armee*, 150, 154.

<sup>2</sup>Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 25; Aikaterína Christofilopoulou, *Βυζαντινή ιστορία τ' 1 1081–1204* (Athens, 2001), 26.

<sup>3</sup>Bryennios, 197. Neither version contradicts the other because the first Komnenoi could actually come from Thrace, and it was only Manuel who could get the aforementioned *oikos* in Asia Minor. For Manuel Komnenos, see Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 25, 38.

against Michael VI (1056–1057),<sup>4</sup> and when he voluntarily abdicated in 1059 and, upon Michael Psellos' advice, became a monk, he did not hand over the imperial diadem to his younger brother John (Alexios' father),<sup>5</sup> but to Constantine of the Doukai family who then acceded to the throne as Constantine X Doukas (1059–1067).<sup>6</sup> This was particularly disappointing for John's ambitious wife Anna<sup>7</sup> who came from the prominent Byzantine aristocratic family of the Dalassenoi.<sup>8</sup> The Doukai, and especially Constantine's older brother, *kaisar* John Doukas, became her arch-enemies,<sup>9</sup> as she never accepted the fact that the imperial diadem slipped from her grasp. She then put all her future hopes into her sons<sup>10</sup>—the first-born Manuel (born ca. 1045),<sup>11</sup> the second Isaakios (born ca. 1050),<sup>12</sup> and the third Alexios (two more sons Adrianos and Nikeforos were born after him).<sup>13</sup> In accordance with family tradition, at the appropriate age all the brothers decided to pursue a military career.<sup>14</sup> Manuel, bestowed with a distinguished court title of *kouropalatēs*, played an important role during the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071),<sup>15</sup> when he was appointed

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 41–47.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 49–57.

<sup>6</sup> Neville, *Heroes*, 150; Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 45–46; Angold, *Empire*, 75–76.

<sup>7</sup> Anna Dalassene married John Komnenos in 1044 at the age of fourteen. Anthoullis A. Dimosthénous, “His Mother's Voice: Anna Dalassene's Influence on her Son, Emperor Alexios Komnenos,” *BA* 16 (2007–2009): 231.

<sup>8</sup> The Dalassenoi came from Asia Minor, where they probably represented the most influential aristocratic family in the first half of the eleventh century. Cheynet, “Basil II and Asia Minor,” *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. by Paul Magdalino (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 19. For the history of the family and Anna in particular, see Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 51–52; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 20–24; Cheynet, “Les Dalassenoi,” *Etudes prosopographiques*, ed. by Cheynet and Vannier, *Byzantina Sorbonensia* 5 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986), 75–117.

<sup>9</sup> Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 52; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 20; Dimosthénous, “Mother,” 235.

<sup>10</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 61–64.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 67–79; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 124–130. Christofilopoulou argues that he was born in 1054, assuming that the age gap between Isaakios and Alexios was only three years, see Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Γ΄ I*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Γ΄ I*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Manuel's social rise in the imperial court was conditioned by his marriage to Romanos Diogenes' relative, as well as the marriage of Manuel's sister Theodora to Romanos' eldest son Constantine Diogenes. It was Anna Dalassene pulling the strings behind these intermarriages, who in this way tried to oust the Doukai opponents from the highest power positions at the imperial court. Dionýsios A. Mamangákis, “Αλέξιος Ἄ Κομνηνός και η Ἄννα Δαλασσηνή: σχέση αμοιβαίας αφοσίωσης ή συνύπαρξη πολιτικής αναγκαιότητας,” *ΕΕΒΕ* 53 (2007–2009): 178.

to a high military post of *prōtostratōr*,<sup>16</sup> but died unexpectedly of an ear infection in the spring of 1071.<sup>17</sup> The next bearer of Anna Dalassene's personal ambitions, as well as the imperial aspirations of the Komnenoi, became the second-born Isaakios, who personally took part in the battle of Manzikert. Later, during the reign of Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), he received a high court title of *prōtoproedros*<sup>18</sup> and held important military posts<sup>19</sup> such as the *domestikos* of the East and the *doux* of Antioch<sup>20</sup> but, ultimately, was not very successful in performing his duties.<sup>21</sup> His younger brother Alexios, who was too young to partake in the battle of Manzikert in person, stood by his side in the following years.<sup>22</sup> From the very first moments, Alexios, under the protective wings of his older brother, soon began to manifest himself as a promising and talented military commander on his own right.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2 MILITARY CAREER AND LIFE OF ALEXIOS KOMNENOS BEFORE 1081

The future Byzantine emperor Alexios Komnenos was born probably in 1057.<sup>24</sup> Although younger than his brother Isaakios, he was much more assertive from the beginning, and the course of his military career, which began during the reign of the emperor Michael VII Doukas, was truly astounding. Michael VII awarded him the title of *proedros* and soon afterward *prōtoproedros*. In 1075, the emperor sent him to suppress the

<sup>16</sup> Neville, *Heroes*, 77; Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 62; Angold, *Empire*, 115.

<sup>17</sup> Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία ἴ 1*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> The fact that, at the end of 1072, Isaakios married Eirene, a cousin of the empress Mary of Alania, wife of Michael VII Doukas, significantly contributed to his important position at the imperial court. See *Alexias*, II.1.4. (p. 56); Neville, *Heroes*, 77–78; Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 67; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> See text above, also Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 68; Kühn, *Armee*, 151, 180; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 125; Angold, *Empire*, 123.

<sup>21</sup> See text above.

<sup>22</sup> *Alexias*, I.1.1. (p. 11).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία ἴ 1*, 28. A favorable impression of young Alexios Komnenos' military capabilities stems from a positive description of his actions under Isaakios' leadership during the failed expedition in 1073 against the Seljuks in the Nikeforos Bryennios' chronicle, see Bryennios, 151 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 87; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία ἴ 1*, 27.

rebellion of Roussel of Bailleul, who started to build an independent enclave in the theme of Armeniakon.<sup>25</sup> On that occasion, he became more acquainted with the combat tactics of the Seljuk Turks. When Nikeforos III Botaneiates ascended to the imperial throne in 1078, Alexios was not only entrusted with the command over the army of the entire western half of the Empire (*domestikos tēs Dyseōs*),<sup>26</sup> but paired with this high military command, he was also awarded an exalted court title of *nōbelissimos*<sup>27</sup> and a little later *sebastos*.<sup>28</sup> As the *domestikos* of the West, Alexios Komnenos successfully fought against the Pechenegs while suppressing Lekas' uprising in Philippoupolis in 1078–1079.<sup>29</sup> He then masterfully neutralized the rebellion of Nikeforos Bryennios the elder, when he managed to defeat him in the battle of Kalavrye (1078).<sup>30</sup> After all this, he was able to suppress yet another rebellion of Dyrrachion's new military commander, *prōtoproedros* Nikeforos Basilakios (another veteran of the battle of Manzikert), whom he defeated in the battle of the Vardar River (1078).<sup>31</sup> Thanks to these repeated swift victories and the fact that he commanded the only undefeated military force of the Byzantine Empire (the eastern part was crumbling at the time, and with it the troops stationed there), Alexios Komnenos became a figure to be reckoned with in the then Byzantine high politics. In January 1078, the young *domestikos* married the underage granddaughter of *kaisar* John Doukas, Eirene Doukaina,<sup>32</sup> despite strong disapproval of his mother Anna Dalassene and those loyal to her.<sup>33</sup> Alexios also got along more than warmly with the empress and wife of Nikeforos III Botaneiates, Mary of Alania, who was, as the ex-wife

<sup>25</sup> See text above.

<sup>26</sup> Bryennios, 259; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 180; *Alexias*, II.1.3. (p. 55); Kühn, *Armee*, 155.

<sup>27</sup> Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 180.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to historical sources, the *cursus honorum* of Alexios Komnenos is safely documented by the findings of his personal lead seals, see John Nesbitt and Nicolas Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art, vol. 1: Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea* (Washington, DC: 1996), 7–8.

<sup>29</sup> Bryennios, 299.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 269 ff.; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 180–181; *Alexias*, I.6.6. (p. 25–26).

<sup>31</sup> Bryennios, 287 ff.; Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 183; *Alexias*, I.7.3., (p. 28ff); Angold, *Empire*, 125.

<sup>32</sup> Bryennios, 234; Angold, *Empire*, 125. It was Alexios Komnenos' second marriage; his first wife was the daughter of Langobard nobleman Argyros, who he married in 1076, but only a year later she died without bearing any children. Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 87–88; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 119–124.

<sup>33</sup> Bryennios, 219, 221; Neville, *Heroes*, 78.

of the emperor Michael VII Doukas, also the mother of the successor to the imperial throne, Constantine Doukas.<sup>34</sup> A visible expression of the empress' personal sympathies was the fact that Mary adopted Alexios so that he could enjoy unrestricted access to the imperial palace.<sup>35</sup> Finally, in the spring of 1081, together with his brother Isaakios, Alexios took advantage of the growing general dissatisfaction with the decrepit government of Nikeforos III Botaneiates and, strongly supported by the discontented Doukai (thanks to Alexios' marriage to Eirene), Botaneiates was dethroned by a successful military coup.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, on 4 April 1081, Alexios Komnenos was crowned in Hagia Sofia as the new Byzantine emperor.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> For the person and origin of Mary of Alania, see Dionysios A. Mamangakis, "Μαρία η Αλανή: Μία μοναχική βασίλισσα ή μία βασιλική μοναχή," *Vyzantiaka* 24 (2004): 225–253; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 188–192.

<sup>35</sup> Bryennios, 259; *Alexias*, II.1.5. (p. 56); Neville, *Heroes*, 78; Mamangakis, Αλανή, 233; Angold, *Empire*, 126.

<sup>36</sup> *Alexias*, II.4.1. (p. 62); Angold, *Empire*, 126–127; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Γ' 1*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Karagiannopoulos, *Κράτος*, 197; Christofilopoulou, *Ιστορία Β' 2*, 260.



## War Against the Normans (1081–1085)

The war conflict that Alexios I Komnenos had to face from the very first moments of his reign so as to protect the Byzantine territories from the conquest plans of the count of Apulia and Calabria, Robert Guiscard, was the first major endurance test of his rule. The nature of the Norman threat practically did not give the new emperor any choice of how or when to deal with it—he had no choice but to react at once with all the forces available to him at the time. The proverbial blessing in disguise in this serious situation was the fact that the Norman attack was directed at the western territories of the Byzantine Empire, where military forces were almost intact by the post-Manzikert crisis.

### 4.1 GEOGRAPHICAL SETTINGS

#### 4.1.1 *Geography of the Western Balkans*

The military operations of the Byzantine-Norman conflict took place in a relatively vast area, encompassing the territory of today's Balkan states of Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia. Geographically, it can be delimited in the west by the Adriatic coast stretching approximately from Cape

Palli (today Kep i Palit)<sup>1</sup> down to the estuary of the Acheloos river (or the northern edge of the mouth of the Gulf of Corinth, including the Ionian islands of Korfu, Lefkas, Ithaki, and Kefalonia). The southern boundary of this area is represented by an imaginary line from the mouth of the Acheloos river toward the present-day town of Karditsa to the summit of Mount Pteri in the Pindos mountain range (2128 meters above sea level), which bends here east toward the town of Volos. The eastern rim is formed by the coast of the northern Aegean Sea up to the mouth of the Vardar river to the Thermaic Gulf and then upstream of this river toward today's Bulgarian-Greek borders. In the north, this area is defined by the aforementioned borderline up to the town of Bitola in North Macedonia, running further along the north shores of Prespa and Ochrid<sup>2</sup> lakes. After crossing today's Macedonian-Albanian borders, the perimeter is completed by an imaginary airline passing through the Albanian capital Tirana back toward Cape Palli.

The main settlement and agricultural production were concentrated to three vast lowlands, the first of which lies in today's Albania along the Adriatic coast in the north-south direction from the city of Shköder to the port of Vlorë (Aulon).<sup>3</sup> The central part of this plain between the Krrabë and Mallakaster mountains, traversed by the lower courses of the Shkumbin<sup>4</sup> and Devoll<sup>5</sup> rivers, is today called the Myzeqeja.<sup>6</sup> Since this flat

<sup>1</sup> Anna Komnene refers to this cape as Παλλία. *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123); Alain Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l'Albanie au Moyen âge. Durazzo et Valona du XI<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Thessalonica: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981), 5, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Its Byzantine name was Ἀχρίς.

<sup>3</sup> In the classical and Byzantine periods, this port was named Αὐλών, and under this name also occurs in the work of Anna Komnene. *Alexias*, III.12.3. ff (p. 117, 147, 161, 176). In Latin sources, it is referred to as *Avellona*. See, for example, *Gesta*, 216. It is a strategically important place, as it is located in the narrowest point of the Strait of Otranto, which separates the coast of Epirus from southern Italy (Apulia). The distance between Aulon and Otranto is only ninety kilometers. Peter Soustal and Johannes Koder, *Nikopolis und Kephallēnia*, TIB, Band 3 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 88. This fact was naturally well known in the eleventh century, see, for example, *Alexias*, XII.8.7. (p. 380). The port also guards the access to the Vijosë river valley from the Epirotic coast. Therefore, Aulon had a thorough fortification during the Byzantine period, of which no further information is known, though. See Ducellier, *Albanie*, 38.

<sup>4</sup> In the ancient period, the river was called *Aenus*.

<sup>5</sup> In the Byzantine period, its name was Διάβολις. *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142). William of Apulia refers to it as *Divalis* and Malaterra even as *fluvius Daemoniorum*. See *Gesta*, 229; Malaterra, 584.

<sup>6</sup> Ducellier, *Albanie*, 6.



expanse of land is made of flood deposits of these rivers, a large part of the seaside lowland was almost constantly waterlogged and had a significantly marshy character.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this alluvial plain prevented any access from the seashore to the Albanian hinterland along the entire length of the Adriatic coast from Cape Palli to Cape Glossa, with the exception of the port of Dürres (Dyrrachion)<sup>8</sup> and its immediate surroundings, and the city of Vlorë (Aulon).<sup>9</sup> The same was true for the Makedonian lowland situated in today's northern Greece, where the only suitable port in the whole coastal area created by the deposits of the Haliakmon and Vardar rivers was the city of Thessalonica, located deep in the Thermaic Gulf. The last extensive lowland was the Thessalian plain, which in turn is drained into the Aegean Sea by the Pineios river. However, it is separated from the Aegean coast by a strip of mountains, and its climate is rather continental.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Koder, *To Βυζάντιο ως χώρος. Εισαγωγή στην Ιστορική Γεωγραφία της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου στη Βυζαντινή Εποχή*, transl. by Dionýsios Ch. Stathakópoulos (Thessalonica, 2005), 26; Ducellier, *Albanie*, 4, 7.

<sup>8</sup> The Byzantines called it *Δυρράχιον* (today's Dürres, in Slavic Drač); in the classical period, its name was *Epidamnos*, and in Latin, *Dirachium*. *Gesta*, 216 ff. This port had an excellent natural strategic location, as it was situated on the highest point of the peninsula running parallel to the coast of Epirus. For good reasons, it was one of the starting points of the well-known route *Via Egnatia* (see text below) and since the ninth century also the capital of the province of the same name (since ca. 800 *thema*, and since c. 1042 *doukato*, i.e., the seat of a military governor with the title of *δούξ*). See Kühn, *Armee*, 236–239. The city had a very strong and durable stone fortification, dating back to the reign of the emperor Anastasios I (491–518). The walls were carefully maintained and repaired, so that even in the eleventh century represented a formidable obstacle for potential invaders. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 26–34; John Haldon, *Οι πόλεμοι του Βυζαντίου* (Athens: Ekdóseis Konstantínou Touríki, 2001), 217; Dominik Heher, “Dyrrhachion/Durrës—an Adriatic Sea Gateway between East and West,” in *Menschen, Bilder, Sprache, Dinge. Wege der Kommunikation zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen 2: Menschen und Worte*, edited by Falko Daim, Christian Gastgeber, Dominik Heher and Claudia Rapp, (Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2019), 173–177. Description of the walls of Dyrrhachion can be found also in Book XIII of the *Alexiad*. See *Alexias*, XIII.3.8. (p. 392). For more recent insight regarding their appearance, see Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 151–152.

<sup>9</sup> Ducellier, *Albanie*, 4. In this respect, both ports were of huge strategic importance.

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Koder and Friedrich Hild, *Hellas und Thessalia*, TIB, Band 1. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976), 43–48; Myrto Veikou, *Byzantine Epirus: A Topography of Transformation. Settlements of the Seventh-Twelfth Centuries in Southern Epirus and Aetoloacarnania, Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 22–23, 25.

Except for these three extensive lowlands, the whole area is covered mostly by mountainous or even alpine terrain with high mountain tops reaching often over 2000 meters above sea level. Its character is determined by parallel limestone massives with ridges stretching in the north-northwest and the south-southeast directions.<sup>11</sup> In Albania, these are successive mountain massives named Skanderbeut, Polisit, Shpatit, Mallakaster, Griba, Lungara, Himarë, Qarrishtë, Gjerë, Dhëmbellit, and Nëmerçke,<sup>12</sup> which continue uninterrupted in Greece as the Grammos mountains and the northern and southern Pindos mountains range with adjacent ridges. Further east, there are the Vernon, Askion, Vourinos, Vermion, Kamvounia, and Pieria mountains, as well as the Olympus massif, and near the Bulgarian-Greek border the Paikon mountains. The Antichasia, Ossa, Mavrovouni, and Pilion mountains are located in the territory of Thessaly,<sup>13</sup> separating the Thessalian plain from the coast of the Aegean Sea, with the only direct connection to the seaside through the Pineios river opening—the Tembi gorge.<sup>14</sup> In the whole area, there are typical narrow fertile flysch valleys stretching between mountain ranges, with significant elevations between the valley bottoms and the surrounding mountain tops.

Concerning water resources of the area, there are two large karst lakes, Ochrid and Prespa, located in the middle between the Albanian coastal lowlands and the Makedonian plain. To the southeast of them, behind the Vernon Mountains, there is Lake Kastoria, and to the northwest, Lakes Chimaditis, Petron, and Vegorit. In the south, the last lake worth mentioning is Lake of Joanina. The remaining water resources are made up of numerous rivers, with the watershed running along the ridge of the Pindos and Gramos mountains and further along the Greek-Albanian and Albanian-Makedonian borders. To the west of this divide, all rivers flow into the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. On the Albanian territory, their upper courses copy the orientation of the main mountain ridges (they run from southeast to northwest), and only after reaching the Albanian seaside lowland, they bend in the general east-west direction. This is the case of the

<sup>11</sup> See also Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> These mountains represent a smooth continuation of the Dinaric Alps. Koder, *Γεωγραφία*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Komnene refers to this long, narrow valley as the Wolf's Throat—*Λυκοστόμιον*. See *Alexias*, V.5.7.ff (p. 156, 158, 160). For a brief description of this location, see Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 91, 109.

Erzen,<sup>15</sup> Shkumbin, Devoll, and Vijosë (Vjosa)<sup>16</sup> rivers. On today's Greek territory (or south of Cape Glossa),<sup>17</sup> rivers flow from northwest to south-east, and since there is no equivalent of a coastal plain, only some of them are able to make the east-west turn before they reach the sea.<sup>18</sup> In general, rivers flowing into the Adriatic and the Ionian Seas are shorter and steeper, but lower courses of some of them were navigable during the Byzantine period.<sup>19</sup> To the east of the watershed, rivers flowing toward the Aegean Sea are much longer and their downflow is not as steep. The main water-courses in the area are the aforementioned Pineios and Haliakmon rivers, flowing approximately in the west-east direction.

When describing the geography of the territory in concern, we must include also the Ionian Islands, which form a chain parallel to the mountain ranges on the coast of Epirus. The most significant of these is the island of Korfu, which runs approximately sixty-two kilometers long.<sup>20</sup> Yet, it lies only about two kilometers off the coast of Epirus at the narrowest point.<sup>21</sup> The highest peak of the island is located in its broader northern part. Three other islands of Lefkas,<sup>22</sup> Ithaki,<sup>23</sup> and Kefalonia<sup>24</sup> are located much further south off the coast of Akarnania and Pelopones. Kefalonia is also the largest of the Ionian islands and as such is also the

<sup>15</sup>In the Byzantine period, the Erzen river was known as *Χαρζάνης*. *Alexias*, IV.5.1. ff (p. 129, 136, 140). Its Latin name in the classical period was *Argenta*. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 5.

<sup>16</sup>In Greek, known as the Aaos river. In the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Vjosa is also referred to as the *Βοοσής*. Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 129.

<sup>17</sup>Cape Glossa is located on the Karaburun promontory.

<sup>18</sup>These are the Arachthos, Kalamas, Louros, Kalasa, Bistrica, Pavla, Kokytos, and Acheron rivers. Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 42. In the Byzantine period, the Acheron was called *Γλυκός*. *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 125); Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 158–159; Ewald Kislinger, “Vertauschte Notizen: Anna Komnene und die Chronologie der Byzantinisch-Normannischen Auseinandersetzung 1081–1085,” *JÖB* 59 (2009): 132.

<sup>19</sup>For example, the Acheloos, Arachthos, Evinos, and Louros rivers. Veikou, *Epirus*, 28.

<sup>20</sup>Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 181.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 43–44.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 195–196.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 168–169.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 175–177. For more information on the topography of the island, see Dionýsios A. Zakythinós, “Κεφαλληνίας ιστορικά και τοπωνυμικά” *ΕΕΒΣ* 6 (1929): 183–202.

most natural center of the whole archipelago.<sup>25</sup> All these islands have good natural ports for maritime transport.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Road Network

It is clear from the description above that, in the eleventh century, the road network of the area was significantly determined by the nature of the terrain. For example, the prevailing orientation of the mountain ridges and valleys in between indicates that it allowed relatively unhindered movement in the north-south direction, but acted as a very effective barrier when traveling from west to east.<sup>27</sup> There are countless mountain passes, which are very narrow and sometimes challengingly steep, though, with some of them located as high as 1000 meters above sea level.

This feature is most pronounced in the territory of today's Albania, respectively Epirus, where the coastal plain is practically isolated from western Macedonia by an extremely rugged mountainous terrain, with only a few passable crossings. Therefore, the *Via Egnatia*, a key road of the Byzantine Balkans connecting the port of Dyrrachion with the capital of the Byzantine Empire Constantinople, crosses mountain ranges only thanks to these passes.<sup>28</sup> Starting at the Adriatic Sea, the road ran from Dyrrachion up the Charzanes river to the present-day town of Petrelë,<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 45. The fertility of the islands is conditioned by heavy winter rainfall with two peaks in November and January. Élisabeth Malamut, *Les îles de l'empire byzantin VIIIe-XIIe siècles*, Tome 1. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1988), 55.

<sup>26</sup>This is especially true for the island of Korfu, which by its importance overshadowed ports on the coast of Epirus. Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 95; Malamut, *Îles*, 60.

<sup>27</sup>John H. Pryor, "Introduction: Modeling Bohemond's March to Thessalonikē," *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 3; Veikou, *Epirus*, 23.

<sup>28</sup>*Via Egnatia* was one of the most important communication routes of the Roman/Byzantine Empire since the Late Antiquity. Its commercial importance gradually declined, but its military and strategic significance remained unchanged. *Via Egnatia* represented the fastest connection between Dyrrachion, Thessalonica, and Constantinople, and therefore a natural incursion route for any invader who wanted to get from Dyrrachion to Makedonia and further east. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 79–80.

<sup>29</sup>This place, under the name of Πετρούλα, is also mentioned by Anna Komnene, but only in connection with the Norman attack led by Bohemund in 1108. *Alexias*, XIII.2.3. (p. 388). It is possible that a small Byzantine fortress (*kastron*) existed there even before the eleventh century. See Ducellier, *Albanie*, 16–17; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 164.

where it bent southeast into the valley below the Krrabë mountains<sup>30</sup> and over a pass descended to the vale with the Shkumbin river running through it. From there, it continued further southeast toward the Deabolis river and up along this river approximately to today's village of Maliqi, from where it turned northward and reached the southern shore of Lake Ochrid.<sup>31</sup> It then ran along its western and northern shores through the towns of Strougai<sup>32</sup> and Ochrid, past the northern shores of Lake Prespa via today's towns of Florina and Edessa<sup>33</sup> from where it led to Thessalonica and further east to Constantinople.

The Via *Egnatia* was connected to another road, which was the only passable route through the marshy terrain of the coastal plain connecting the ports of Dyrrachion and Aulon. Its first section from Dyrrachion to the lower Shkumbin river was identical to the *Egnatia*, but then it branched off and continued straight in the south-southeast direction to the present-day town of Lushnjë, where, leading through elevated and relatively dry places, it turned south-southwestward, and after passing approximately through today's town of Fieri and crossing the lower Vjosë river, it reached the port of Aulon. The road followed the coast to the south (with a turn-off to the port of Jericho/Orikon),<sup>34</sup> crossed the Akrokeraunian mountains<sup>35</sup> over the Llogara pass (Qafa e Llogarase) at an elevation of 1055 meters above sea level,<sup>36</sup> and descended back to the coast of Epirus at an area known from the Byzantine sources as Vagenetia<sup>37</sup> until it reached

<sup>30</sup> Anna Komnene uses the name of Slavic origin Babagora (Old woman mountain). *Alexias*, IV.8.4. (p. 140). For the identification of Babagora with the valley under the Krrabë Mountains, see Ducellier, *Albanie*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> This route was suggested by Alain Ducellier on the basis of evidence from the Byzantine sources. The reason why Via *Egnatia* in this section in the eleventh century deviated from its original route was the existence of an independent Albanian enclave on the upper Shkumbin river, the so-called Arbanon. The new route bypassed this area from the south through the Deabolis river valley. See Ducellier, *Albanie*, 76–80. For a more accurate location of the Arbanon area, see Ducellier, “L’Arbanon at les Albanais au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *TM* 3 (1968): 353–368.

<sup>32</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.4. (p. 151).

<sup>33</sup> In the Byzantine period, this city was known as Vodena.

<sup>34</sup> *Alexias*, I.14.4. ff (p. 48, 125); Ducellier, *Albanie*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> On the seashore, the mountain range ends on the Karaburun Peninsula with Cape Glossa.

<sup>36</sup> Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 88.

<sup>37</sup> The name Vagenetia derives from the name of the Slavic tribe of the Baiountai documented from the first quarter of the seventh century. Its overall territorial scope is uncertain, but it apparently belonged to the Epirotic coast opposite the island of Korfu and stretched inland to the town of Ioannina. Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 119–120.

another important port, Butrint (Bouthrotos/Vothrenton/Butrinto),<sup>38</sup> lying directly opposite the northern part of Korfu.

The northern part of Epirus in today's Albania was connected with the southern part in present-day Greece by a road that started at the port of Aulon and led upstream of the Vijosë river through a deep mountain valley to the level of the present-day town of Tepelenë, where it began to follow the Dropulli valley up the Drino river, one of the Vijosë inflows, and through the town of Gjirokastër (Argyrokastro)<sup>39</sup> crossed today's Greek-Albanian borders. From there, the road veered roughly east to Kalpakion, where it bent southeast to the town of Ioannina.<sup>40</sup> This road then followed the Louros river until it reached the town of Arta on the lower Arachthos river.<sup>41</sup>

Another significant road connecting Ioannina and Arta and Thessaly in the east led from Ioannina to today's town of Metsovo, and after crossing the local Zygos or Katara pass at 1551 meters above sea level,<sup>42</sup> dividing the southern and northern parts of the Pindos mountains, it reached the towns of Kalambaka and Trikala, where it turned eastward and continued to the most important center of Thessaly, the city of Larissa.<sup>43</sup> It was possible to set off from Larissa to the northeast and down the Pineios river through the aforementioned Tembi/Lykostomion vale to reach the Aegean coast.<sup>44</sup> For a journey to Thessalonica, it was necessary to follow the seashore northward via the town of Platamon, and after crossing the

<sup>38</sup> *Alexias*, III.12.3. (p. 117); Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 132–134; Ducellier, *Albanie*, 42–43. See also Pagóna Papadopoulou, “Five Lead Seals from Byzantine Butrint (Albania),” *SBS* 11 (2012): 133–142.

<sup>39</sup> In the Byzantine period, Dryinupolis (Drinopol), originally Hadrianoupolis (not to be mistaken with Adrianoupolis in Thrace, today's Edirne in Turkey). For more detailed information, see Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 111–112, 146–148.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 165–167.

<sup>41</sup> Originally, in ancient times this town was called Ambrakia. Arta is mentioned for the first time precisely in connection with the course of the Norman-Byzantine conflict *sub anno* 1082 (see text below). Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 113–115.

<sup>42</sup> Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 89. This route was the main link between western and eastern Greece and was the only one in the Byzantine period suitable for transporting bulky items, as it was also accessible for wagons, thus implying its immense strategic importance. Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 92.

<sup>43</sup> The road between Trikala and Larissa represented the most significant connection in Thessaly. See Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 91.

estuaries of the Haliakmon and the Vardar rivers, respectively, the road joined the Via *Egnatia*, leading to the second largest Byzantine city.

In addition to these main communications, there was another road connecting the Via *Egnatia* to the just mentioned southerly route in the central part of this area, enabling travel from Kastoria to the south, either southwest to Ioannina or southeast to Thessaly. It started from Kastoria upstream the Haliakmon river toward today's towns of Neapolis and Siatista, from where it continued via the present-day town of Grevena to the area of the aforementioned town of Metsovo. At this point, the road forked, and it was necessary to turn either westward and descend to Ioannina, or eastward and follow the road described above to Kalambaka, Trikala, and Larissa.

From the overview of the topography of the landscape and the road network of the Byzantine territory in the eleventh century, it is possible to conclude that traveling on land in Epirus and western Makedonia was possible only on designated roads because of the rugged mountain terrain. This was very pronounced in the case of armed forces, whether attacking or defending, which had to follow the road network in order to reach their destinations, and could encounter difficulties if their supply train was too bulky for passing through narrow mountain passes and defiles. In general, the traveling was conceivable only on foot or by horse, and because of the state of roads and paths, sturdy pack animals, rather than wagons pulled by horses or oxen, were used for transport purposes. Moreover, in the autumn and winter months, mountain areas were virtually impassable due to extreme cold weather and intense snowfall. Therefore, it comes as no particular surprise that the local terrain was utterly unsuitable for large-scale military operations. Combat activities that took place there were necessarily limited and focused primarily on gaining control of, or at least blocking, key locations and positions on the main communication routes. Important outposts were often heavily fortified and therefore practically impregnable.<sup>45</sup> Thus, siege warfare proved to be the dominant method of waging a war. Only few coastal areas were suitable for military operations based on maneuvers and field battles. For the same reasons, the control over the Epirotic coast and its ports was important, because maritime

<sup>45</sup>The most characteristic feature of the area described here has remained virtually unchanged to this day, as is evident, for example, from the fact that today's modern road network (with exceptions determined by the existing national borders of the present states of Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece) essentially respects the course of medieval roads.

routes along the coastline ensured easier transport of supplies, merchandise, or materials. At the same time, such control gave significant strategic advantage in military operations. Nevertheless, even naval activities had to cease during the winter months because of the harsh weather conditions and stormy seas.

## 4.2 CHRONOLOGICAL SETTINGS

The first military conflict between the Normans from southern Italy, commanded by Robert Guiscard, and the Byzantine Empire headed by the emperor Alexios Komnenos occurred in the years 1081–1085. The written sources at our disposal provide sufficient support for this traditional dating.<sup>46</sup> However, if we want to arrive at a more precise determination of the chronological sequence of individual key events, one quickly realizes that only some of them are accurately and unambiguously dated in the sources. In addition, some events are chronologically jumbled and described in a haphazard manner.<sup>47</sup>

### 4.2.1 *Fixed Dates*

The main historical sources are not too abundant in terms of fixed dates. For example, Anna Komnene dedicates the first six books of the *Alexiad* (out of a total of fifteen books) to a description of the war against the

<sup>46</sup>The mainstays for obtaining chronological data of the Byzantine-Norman conflict are mainly these three works, the *Alexiad* by Anna Komnene, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* by William of Apulia, and the work of Gaufrid Malaterra *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*. For more information on these works and Anna Komnene's use of the latter two, see Emily Albu, *The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001); Michael Angold, "Knowledge of Byzantine History in the West: The Norman Historians (Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries)," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 25 (2002): 19–33; Paul Brown, "The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*: A 'Byzantine' history?" *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011): 162–179; Peter Frankopan, "Turning Latin into Greek: Anna Komnene and the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*," *Journal of Medieval History* 39 (2013): 80–99; Graham A. Loud, "Anna Komnene and her Sources for the Normans in Southern Italy," *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Ian Wood and G. A. Loud (London: Hambledon, 1991), 41–57; James Howard-Johnston, "Bilingual Reading, the *Alexiad* and the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*," *Reading in the Byzantine Empire*, ed. by Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 467–498.

<sup>47</sup>This deficiency concerns mainly the work of the *Alexiad*, see text below.



Normans.<sup>48</sup> Yet, despite this rather large coverage, the Byzantine princess gives only a few specific dates, some of which she herself later contradicts, for example, the date of departure of the main part of Guiscard's military forces from southern Italy to Epirus. First, Anna Komnene reports that the duke sailed off in 1081 at the time of the spring equinox (around 21 March)<sup>49</sup> but later states that this happened at the time of the rising of Sirius (at the turn of July and August),<sup>50</sup> only to claim further that, based on the testimony of Georgios Palaiologos, Guiscard set sail in June.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, there are other fixed dates available to us on which we can base our timeline, such as the day Guiscard appeared under the walls of Dyrrachion on 17 June 1081<sup>52</sup> and the day of arrival of the main Byzantine forces under Alexios Komnenos' command at Dyrrachion on 15 October 1081,<sup>53</sup> as well as the day of the decisive battle of Dyrrachion, which unequivocally took place on 18 October 1081.<sup>54</sup> The last date recorded by Anna Komnene marks the beginning of Bohemund's siege of Larissa, which, as she says, happened on the day of the feast of St. Georgios the Martyr.<sup>55</sup>

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* by William of Apulia contains significantly less chronologically relevant data. In the text directly describing Guiscard's attack on the Byzantine Empire, which takes up a greater part of Book IV and the entire Book V, not a single chronological indication can be found, except for a few vague time references with minimal informative value such as "*a year later*,"<sup>56</sup> "*when the winter ended*,"<sup>57</sup> and so on. Of course, the exact dating of some undated events such as the death of the pope Gregory VII in Salerno<sup>58</sup> and the death of Guiscard, who succumbed to fever on the island of Kefalonia in the summer of 1085,<sup>59</sup> is known from other sources.

<sup>48</sup> For an overview of the contents of individual books, see, for example, Georgina Buckler, *Anna Comnena: A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 11–26.

<sup>49</sup> *Alexias*, I.16.1. (p. 51).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, III.12.4. (p. 118).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.2.1. (p. 122).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.1.1. (p. 120).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.5.2. (p. 129).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.6.1. (p. 132).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, V.5.2. (p. 154). For the resolution of this disputed issue, see text below.

<sup>56</sup> *Gesta*, 232.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

A very similar situation can be found in Gaufred Malaterra's historical work, which describes the Byzantine-Norman war in Book III. Besides a few general chronological references, only one fixed date can be found, the value of which is very questionable, though, since it has no direct relation to the war events. It is a solar eclipse that was visible in southern Italy on 6 February 1084 and which, according to Malaterra, heralded the deaths of three prominent men in the following year—pope Gregory VII, Robert Guiscard, and William the Conqueror, the duke of Normandy and the king of England.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.2.2 *Contested Dates*

Fortunately, the historically first Norman attempt to conquer the Byzantine Empire has attracted many researchers, so there has been a number of general<sup>61</sup> as well as partial<sup>62</sup> attempts to organize the varied chronological information provided in our three main primary sources mentioned above.<sup>63</sup> Another most fortunate circumstance is the fact that the key events of the conflict are described in the main written sources in almost an identical chronological order. The most reliable source in this context appears to be the *Gesta* of William of Apulia, which was written shortly after the described events, that is, between 1095 and 1099.<sup>64</sup> In this respect, the *Gesta* compensates for its shortcomings in the field of absolute chronology, where, in turn, the historical work of Anna Komnene, despite all its inherent limitations due to the greater lapse of time between the real events and Anna Komnene's writing, seems to be more useful.

The first controversial moment in the chronology of the war against the Normans is the very beginning of Guiscard's military campaign. As

<sup>60</sup> Malaterra, 589.

<sup>61</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 64–94; Buckler, *Commena*, 406–414; Richard Bünnemann, *Robert Guiscard 1015–1085: Ein Normanne erobert Süditalien* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1997), 344–347.

<sup>62</sup> Apóstolos A. Glavíνας, “Οι Νορμανδοί στη Θεσσαλία και η πολιορκία της Λάρισα (1082–1083),” *Vyzantiaka* 4 (1984): 33–45; Apóstolos A. Glavíνας, “Οι Νορμανδοί στην Καστοριά (1082–1083),” *Vyzantina* 13, vol. 2 (1985): 1253–1265; Iriníeos Filíppου, “Η παράδοση του πρώτου βυζαντινονορμανδικού πολέμου στην Αλεξιάδα της Άννας Κομνηνής και στις λατινικές πηγές: αποκλίσεις, παραλείψεις και χρονολογικά προβλήματα (1084–1085),” *Vyzantiaka* 29 (2010): 131–151.

<sup>63</sup> The latest and most thorough attempt to determine the chronological order of events in question has been carried out by Kislínger, see Kislínger, “Notizen,” 127–145 (in particular 145). Despite the fact that some conclusions are still open to scholarly debate, it represents a very useful starting point for the purpose of this work.

<sup>64</sup> Albu, *Normans*, 110; Brown, “History,” 162.

mentioned above, Anna Komnene, in connection with the departure of the main Norman naval forces from Otranto toward the island of Korfu, provides three different time dates, ranging between the day of the spring equinox and the turn of July/August 1081. However, knowing for sure that the Norman host encamped under the walls of Dyrrachion on 17 June 1081,<sup>65</sup> it can be assumed that the main part of the expedition sailed from Otranto at the turn of May and June 1081,<sup>66</sup> which roughly corresponds to one of the three dates mentioned by Anna. Thus, the departure and crossing of the Strait of Otranto by the Norman fleet seems to have taken place sometime in the first half of June 1081.<sup>67</sup> In this case, Anna's first account of Guiscard's departure at the time of the spring equinox could be considered a mistake, or a confusion on her part, because at the time only a small squadron led by Guiscard's son Bohemund was sent toward the coast of Epirus as a vanguard of the Norman forces.<sup>68</sup> This unit headed also to the island of Korfu and the adjacent areas of Epirus, so Anna's mistake is understandable, considering a retrospection of more than half of a century.<sup>69</sup> Based on these considerations, it is possible to determine the actual beginning of the first Norman attack against the Byzantine Empire at the end of March 1081 (or the day of the spring equinox), whereas the main forces led by Robert Guiscard set sail from Otranto on 20 May 1081.<sup>70</sup>

Another point of contention is linked to the chain of events associated with the siege of Larissa and, in particular, its start and end. According to

<sup>65</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.1. (p. 120).

<sup>66</sup> Kislinger further argues that the date of departure of the main forces was 20 May 1081. See Kislinger, "Notizen," 129 (note 1 in Chap. 2). Also compare with the date of the fall of Korfu on the following day on 21 May 1081, Graham A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 21; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.4. (p. 122). See also text below.

<sup>68</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 114.

<sup>69</sup> It is also possible that in March, before Bohemund's mission, another smaller vanguard group of fifteen ships sailed off toward Korfu, as referred only by Malaterra. Malaterra, 582.

<sup>70</sup> Günter Prinzing, "Epirus und die ionischen Inseln im Hochmittelalter. Zur Geschichte der region im Rahmen des Themas Nikopolis und der Insel-themen Kerkyra und Kephallenia im Zeitraum ca. 1000–1204," *Südost-Forschungen* 56 (1997): 9; Kislinger, "Notizen," 129. At this point, it should be noted that the date assumed corresponds to maritime navigation practices in this part of the Mediterranean from the ancient times to the sixteenth century, since the earlier sailing of the Norman ships would not actually have been likely due to bad winter weather threatening maritime traffic from around the turn of October/November to the turn of March/April. John H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649–1571* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12, 87–88.

Anna Komnene, Bohemund besieged the city on the feast day of St. Georgios the Martyr, and this siege lasted for six months.<sup>71</sup> In the past, historians automatically identified this holiday with St. Georgios' day celebrated in the Orthodox Church on 23 April, which logically led to the dating of the beginning of the siege to 23 April 1083, and subsequently the battle of Larissa and the end of the siege to October 1083.<sup>72</sup> However, it has been convincingly argued that in this case it may be another *dies festus* associated with St. Georgios—the feast of the deposition of his remains, which is traditionally celebrated in the Orthodox Church on 3 October.<sup>73</sup> If Anna Komnene was referring to this day, it would then be possible to date the beginning of the siege of Larissa as early as 3 October 1082.<sup>74</sup> This hypothesis is further supported by an excerpt from the *Alexiad* describing the events in the late fall of 1082, according to which “Bohemund meanwhile left Kastoria and moved to Larissa with the intention of wintering there.”<sup>75</sup> If the siege of Larissa had not started before 23 April 1083, it would have been difficult to explain what Bohemund and his host were doing between the fall of 1082 and the spring of 1083 in the Balkans (the Normans would certainly not be wandering around the snow-covered local mountains).<sup>76</sup> It would be reasonable to conclude that Bohemund, after leaving Kastoria, moved to Larissa and on 3 October 1082 besieged the city. Therefore, the decisive battle outside the city had to take place six months earlier than assumed in the past, that is, in the middle of April 1083.<sup>77</sup>

The last important chronological issue to be discussed briefly is the fact that the entire Chap. 3 of Book IV of the *Alexiad* is misplaced in the context of the whole description of the war against the Normans and has nothing in common with the events of 1081.<sup>78</sup> In fact, it depicts events taking place in the winter of 1084/1085 and in the spring of 1085, the

<sup>71</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.2. (p. 154).

<sup>72</sup> Buckler, *Comnena*, 412; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 136–137

<sup>73</sup> This dating has been argued by Glavinas, see Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 40; Aléxios G. C. Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica: The Norman Capture of Italy (to A.D. 1081) and the First Two Invasions in Byzantium (A.D. 1081–1085 and 1107–1108)* (Leuven Uitgeverij Peeters en Departament Oosterse Studies, 2007), 60.

<sup>74</sup> Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 40.

<sup>75</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153).

<sup>76</sup> Chalandon pointed out that the chronology in this part of the *Alexiad* is wrong and expressed the view that the siege of Larissa began in October or November 1082 and not as late as April 1083. Chalandon, *Essai*, 88 (note 6 in Chap. 1).

<sup>77</sup> See also text below.

<sup>78</sup> Kislinger, “Notizen,” 132, 143; Howard-Johnston, “Bilingual Reading,” 493ff.

dominant theme of which is the tough wintering of the Norman host and fleet in the mouth of the Glykys river,<sup>79</sup> as well as Guiscard’s clever plan, which allowed him to launch ships onto water in late spring or early summer despite the severe drought that lowered the water level of the river surface to a minimum.<sup>80</sup> This conclusion can be reached by comparing Anna Komnene’s text with the *Gesta*, wherein the events concerned are provided in the correct chronological order, that is, within the context of 1084 and 1085.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, based on the text of the *Alexiad*, it is possible to obtain a strong impression that the Glykys river was in sight of Dyrrachion (or at least in close proximity to it), as “*Robert’s men, bivouacking by the River Glykys, meanwhile found it no easy matter to get supplies from the mainland, for when they left their entrenchments to forage or bring in other necessities there was interference from Dyrrachion.*”<sup>82</sup> In fact, these two sites are approximately 300 kilometers apart as the crow flies. This minor detail further shows that the Byzantine princess did not always fully master the final editing of her text and that it needs to be taken into consideration that her narrative contains serious factual and chronological mistakes here and there.

### 4.3 COURSE OF THE WAR

The string of events that eventually led to the first Byzantine-Norman war during the reign of Alexios Komnenos began much earlier and is undoubtedly linked to the dashing personal ambitions of the Norman duke of Apulia and Calabria, Robert of Hauteville, better known under the sobriquet Guiscard, as well as to the political incompetence and lack of diplomatic skills of Alexios Komnenos’ immediate predecessors on the imperial throne, especially Michael VII Doukas<sup>83</sup> and, to a lesser extent, Nikeforos III Botaneiates. Robert Guiscard remains an example of the medieval “knightly” adventurer, who had to fight hard repeatedly and often dishonestly for his elevated status. The attack on the Byzantine Empire was

<sup>79</sup> Today, the Acheron (Mauropotamos) river located in southern Epirus, see the text and note 18.

<sup>80</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.3. (p. 125).

<sup>81</sup> *Gesta*, 246, 248.

<sup>82</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 125). Many modern historians uncritically take over this information and incorporate it into their descriptions of the Byzantine-Norman war, thus committing the same mistake.

<sup>83</sup> For Michael VII Doukas’ reign, see, for example, the latest summary monograph by Anthoullis A. Dimosthénous, *Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078): The Incapable Emperor?* (Thessalonica: Ekdot. Oikos Ant. Stamoulis, 2005).

supposed to be the climax of his more than three decades-long career,<sup>84</sup> during which he worked his way up from the position of a wandering Norman robber knight with only a handful of servants trying to survive in the inhospitable and mountainous hinterland of Calabria<sup>85</sup> to the undisputable ruler of the entire southern part of Italy and, thanks to the conquest efforts of his younger brother Roger, also of a large part of Sicily.<sup>86</sup> This life energy abounding and resourceful man in his early sixties<sup>87</sup> was not satisfied with his lifelong achievements,<sup>88</sup> but intended to extend his dominion also across the Adriatic Sea. The chaotic political situation in the Byzantine Empire at the time only played into his hands.

It is possible that Guiscard started to think his new “project” over as early as 1076, but definitely gave it a serious thought two years later. There were several reasons for this new endeavor. First of all, it was the abrupt, and for Guiscard humiliating, conclusion of his diplomatic negotiations with the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas concerning the marriage of his daughter Olympias to the emperor’s son and successor to the throne Constantine.<sup>89</sup> During these talks, which started in 1074, Guiscard clearly had the upper hand, as it was the Byzantines who desperately needed help of the Norman duke against the Seljuk Turks. As a result, the would-be imperial bride traveled to Constantinople in 1076,<sup>90</sup> where, in accordance with the Byzantine court protocol, she was given a Byzantine name Helena and was to be raised by the empress Mary of Alania, the mother of her

<sup>84</sup> Guiscard arrived in southern Italy in 1046/1047. Loud, *Guiscard*, 105. For a brief overview of his achievements, see, for example, Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 35.

<sup>85</sup> Ferdinand Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile*. Tome I. (Paris: A. Picard, 1907), 118–119; John J. Norwich, *The Normans in Sicily* (Harlow: Longman, 1970), 77. It was at that time that Robert earned his nickname Guiscard, meaning cunning. Huguette Taviani Carozzi, *La terreur du monde: Robert Guiscard et la conquête normande en Italie* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 189, 249.

<sup>86</sup> Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 192. The conquest of the whole of Sicily was successfully completed only in 1091. Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Guiscard was born around 1016 in Normandy as the sixth son of Tankred of Hauteville (but the eldest of Tankred’s second marriage to Fressenda). Norwich, *Normans*, 69; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 117.

<sup>88</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 59.

<sup>89</sup> See Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 394–396; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 260–264; Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 53. Anna Komnene, betrothed to the same Constantine as a child, could not miss a pointed remark in her historical work that the young and handsome Constantine literally fled from his boorish Norman bride as children do from bogeys. *Alexias*, I.12.11. (p. 43). For a detailed description of the diplomatic negotiations, see, for example, McQueen, “Relations,” 428–437.

<sup>90</sup> Lupus Protospatharius, 45; Chalandon, *Essai*, 62; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 39.

future groom. The ambitious Norman duke must have imagined how his new position as the father of the future empress of Byzantium would open up new and unexpected horizons to him in the East.<sup>91</sup> However, all Guiscard's grand plans suddenly came to naught in 1078, when Michael VII was overthrown by Nikeforos Botaneiates. The deposed emperor was forced to enter a monastery and become a monk. Naturally, with the advent of the new emperor, there was also a sharp turn in the foreign imperial politics, and the wedding and alliance plans with the Normans were canceled. As a result, Helena/Olympias was moved from the imperial palace to a convent.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunate Guiscard did not have time to benefit from the high position promised to him. In the end, however, he fared better, as under the pretext of protecting his daughter's rights, he began to prepare an armed expedition against Byzantium in order to restore Michael VII Doukas to the imperial throne. In reality, he strived to acquire new territories on the opposite side of the Strait of Otranto and, if circumstances allow it, possibly also the imperial title itself.<sup>93</sup>

The Byzantines never came to terms with the loss of their territories in southern Italy in 1071,<sup>94</sup> and there is quite a lot of indications that at least part of Guiscard's problems with his recently subdued Lombard and Greek subjects in southern Italy, as well as part of the Norman nobility (including members of the Hauteville dynasty),<sup>95</sup> were repeatedly caused by the Byzantine agents and money sent from Epirus, or directly from Dyrrachion, to the Norman-controlled Mezzogiorno.<sup>96</sup> In addition, there were several political exiles and opponents of Guiscard's rule living in Dyrrachion, waiting for a good opportunity to return.<sup>97</sup> It was also clear

<sup>91</sup> Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 398; Buckler, *Comnena*, 450.

<sup>92</sup> Malaterra, 579; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 265.

<sup>93</sup> Loud, *Guiscard*, 213; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 420; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 42.

<sup>94</sup> For an opposite view, see Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 397–398.

<sup>95</sup> Guiscard made many enemies by his uncompromising approach, in which he gradually sidelined not only other noble Norman families of Mezzogiorno (Normans of Trani or Kapua), but also his close relatives (first, his older half-brothers and, once they died, also their sons, as well as his own younger brothers, etc.). See Valeria Eads, "Sichelgaita of Salerno: Amazon or Trophy Wife?" *The Journal of Medieval Military History* 3 (2005): 83, 87.

<sup>96</sup> The first revolt after the conquest of Bari took place in Apulia in 1072–1073, and one of its main figures was Abelard, one of Guiscard's overlooked nephews. Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 223; Loud, *Guiscard*, 137. The rebellion of Guiscard's vassals was supported by an unspecified number of Byzantine ships sent from Dyrrachion. The Byzantine fleet was commanded by a Norman defector, count Goscelin of Molfetta. Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 270, 278. Other similar revolts followed in various places in Apulia and Calabria in 1075 and 1078/1079. Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 298. See also Stanton, *Operations*, 48.

<sup>97</sup> Norwich, *Normans*, 221; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 423.

that if, at some point in the future, the Byzantines attempted to seize control of the territories in southern Italy, the starting point for it would certainly be Dyrrachion because of its strategic location.<sup>98</sup> Conquest of this key base would put a definite end to similar complications in the future.<sup>99</sup> Thus, failure of the Byzantines to keep the promises provided the Norman duke with a most welcome pretext to attack.

Unquestionably, another aspect that lured the ambitious Norman duke was the obvious strategic, military, and economic importance of Dyrrachion as a port and transit hub for both land and sea transport.<sup>100</sup> Whoever was in charge of Dyrrachion, virtually controlled the entire coast of Epirus,<sup>101</sup> and if able to gain even the Ionian islands, he would find himself in the position of the undisputed hegemon of all the maritime routes in the Adriatic from the Strait of Otranto to the mouth of the Gulf of Patra. The city also housed a base and arsenal of the Byzantine fleet.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, Dyrrachion was a natural place for the concentration of local trade, in particular wood and agricultural products (mainly crops, but also vegetables and cheese), which came from the fertile Epirotic hinterland.<sup>103</sup> This is why important trade colonies were established in this area in the eleventh century, dominated mainly by the Venetian and Amalfitan merchants.<sup>104</sup> In particular, the presence of a strong Amalfitan community (albeit less numerous than the Venetian) represented an undeniable advantage for Guiscard in formulating his strategy for the upcoming attack, as the city of Amalfi had belonged to the Norman-controlled Mezzogiorno

<sup>98</sup> John V. A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 281.

<sup>99</sup> The importance of Dyrrachion is also evidenced by the fact that in the middle and late Byzantine period, the whole province was not called Epirus as in the late ancient period, but *thema/doukato Dyrrachion*. See also Ducellier, *Albanie*, 26–27.

<sup>100</sup> Ducellier, *Albanie*, 76, 83–84; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 160–161, 169. For the importance of Dyrrachion as the starting point of the *Via Egnatia*, see text above. See also Alexandris, *Δύρακις*, 316.

<sup>101</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 73; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 269.

<sup>102</sup> Ducellier, *Albanie*, 60, 102.

<sup>103</sup> For the fertility of this area, in particular the southern part with the towns of Aulon, Kanina, and Jericho, see Alain Ducellier, “L’Albanie entre Orient et Occident aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 19 (1976): 4; Ducellier, *Albanie*, 60–61.

<sup>104</sup> Ducellier, “Orient,” 5; Ducellier, *Albanie*, 70–72.



since 1073, so its merchants thus became a natural core of Norman partisans in the city.<sup>105</sup>

Last but not least, Guiscard was also under growing pressure to resolve poignant family matters, that is, the question of inheritance of his eldest son Marcus Bohemund of his first marriage.<sup>106</sup> In 1073, he gave all his south Italian estates and the ducal title to Roger Borsa, the eldest son of his second marriage to Sikelgaita.<sup>107</sup> Bohemund, who was very similar in physical appearance and character to his audacious and unscrupulous father,<sup>108</sup> was thus left as an illegitimate child with no property or hereditary title.<sup>109</sup> It was clear to all contemporaries, including Robert Guiscard himself, that if he died unexpectedly, the rather timid Roger Borsa would be able to defend his inheritance rights from the older and much more belligerent half-brother only with great difficulty.<sup>110</sup>

The military preparations for the expedition against the Byzantine Empire began only in the course of 1080, because Guiscard first had to deal with all the “domestic” south Italian affairs before implementing the corresponding measures. The Norman duke was primarily busy with the continuing conquest of southern Italy, in which, after the domination of Bari, he focused on the remnants of the Lombard principalities still surviving in the north (Salerno, Naples, and Benevento), the strongest representative of which was Salerno under the rule of Sikelgaita’s younger brother, prince Gisulf II (1052–1077), Guiscard’s formal ally.<sup>111</sup> Salerno finally fell

<sup>105</sup> Loud, *Guiscard*, 137. Guiscard could thus count on his subjects that they would influence the other inhabitants of Dyrrachion and make them surrender, or that they would ultimately play the role of a fifth column. His premise was not that far from the truth, see text below.

<sup>106</sup> Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 42. Guiscard’s first wife was Alberada, the aunt of the Norman count Gerard of Bounalbergo. Norwich, *Normans*, 78; Loud, *Guiscard*, 113.

<sup>107</sup> Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 225; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 318; Guiscard’s second wife was the Lombard princess of Salerno, Sikelgaita, who he married in 1057 or 1058. Eads, “Sichelgaita,” 81.

<sup>108</sup> Norwich, *Normans*, 227.

<sup>109</sup> Loud also argues that one of the unspoken secondary motives for Guiscard’s expedition against Byzantium was to secure a duchy for his eldest son, see Loud, *Guiscard*, 217.

<sup>110</sup> However, if some of Orderic Vitalis’ allusions can be believed, Guiscard counted on Bohemund’s participation in the expedition not only because he intended to conquer lands that his firstborn son could later inherit, but also because he was trying to protect him from the hatred and deadly intrigues of Roger’s mother and his second wife, Sikelgaita. See, for example, Orderic Vitalis, 28, 30.

<sup>111</sup> However, in 1072, Gisulf II supported the rebellious Guiscard’s vassals. Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 223–224.

into Guiscard's hands after a prolonged siege of 1077<sup>112</sup> and immediately became the capital of the Norman Mezzogiorno. However, the Norman duke failed to conquer Naples and Benevento.<sup>113</sup> Occasionally, Guiscard's Normans ventured as far as the northern, remote, and wild area of the Abruzzi mountains, which already belonged to the papal domain in Rome.<sup>114</sup> For these blunders, Guiscard was "honored" with double excommunication from the pope Gregory VII (1073–1085) within a few years.<sup>115</sup>

The complicated relationship between the Norman duke and the powerful pope was definitively reconciled in June 1080, when the two men met in person in Ceprano.<sup>116</sup> From this moment, Guiscard became the protector of St. Peter's stool and Gregory VII in return confirmed Guiscard's ducal title in all the territories he had conquered, including those contested in the Abruzzi area.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile, the Norman conquest of Sicily continued, with the capture of Palermo in 1072 as the key milestone, although the Arab resistance was finally broken only almost twenty years later in 1091.<sup>118</sup> Successful expeditions aimed at territorial expansion alternated with punitive campaigns against rebellions of the just subjected

<sup>112</sup> Lupus Protospatharius, 45.

<sup>113</sup> Loud, *Guiscard*, 141–142.

<sup>114</sup> One of Guiscard's nephews (son of Guiscard's brother Mauger) and a loyal ally and supporter, Robert of Loritello, was very agile in this regard. Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 227, 249–251; Laurent Feller, "The Northern Frontier of Norman Italy, 1060–1140," *The Society of Norman Italy*, ed. by G. A. Loud and A. Metcalfe (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 59–60. For Robert of Loritello, the count of Chieti, see Léon-Robert Ménager, "Inventaire des familles normandes et franques émigrées en Italie méridionale et en Sicile (XI<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles)," *Roberto il Guiscardo e il suo tempo: Atti delle prime giornate normanno-sveve Bari 28–29 maggio 1973* (Rome, 1975), 339.

<sup>115</sup> First in 1075 and later in 1078. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 139; Loud, *Guiscard*, 201–205.

<sup>116</sup> *Gesta*, 204, 206; *Alexias*, I.13.6. (p. 44–45); Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 414.

<sup>117</sup> The motive of Gregory VII for such a benevolent approach to Guiscard was a clear reflection of deteriorating relations between him and the Roman-German emperor Henry IV (1056–1105), against whom he needed a strong military ally on the Italian soil. The Norman duke, in turn, naturally intended to secure his territories diplomatically before his courageous attack on the Byzantine Balkans. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 139–140; Loud, *Guiscard*, 206.

<sup>118</sup> Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 353.

adversaries and the disgruntled Norman aristocracy, which Robert Guiscard managed to successfully subdue in the first half of 1080.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, the first possible opportunity to implement Guiscard's aggressive intentions toward the Byzantine Empire finally occurred in 1080.<sup>120</sup> In the midst of preparations for the expedition, the Norman duke was given another significant advantage. In early 1080, a man in the monk's vestments named Rector appeared at his ducal court in Salerno, asserting that he was the deposed emperor Michael VII and asking Guiscard for armed assistance in reclaiming the Byzantine throne.<sup>121</sup> It is very likely that the Norman duke knew from the beginning that this man was an imposter but nevertheless treated him as a real former emperor.<sup>122</sup> His presence at Salerno gave Guiscard exactly what he needed—another credible pretext for unleashing military actions against Nikeforos III Botaneiates. Guiscard would be able to present his expedition not only as an act of revenge for the mistreatment of Helena/Olympias by the Byzantines,<sup>123</sup> but primarily as an act of legitimate defense of his noble ally against an illegitimate regime serving a usurper in Constantinople. Guiscard's expedition with the proclaimed intention to help Michael VII Doukas was eventually given a full spiritual blessing of the pope Gregory VII himself, who on 25 July 1080, in a letter, called on "the faithful of St. Peter" to come to the fore to help the ousted emperor. At the same time, the pope sent a banner of

<sup>119</sup>Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 425. The aforementioned Abelard was forced to flee to Byzantium, while other dissatisfied noblemen (e.g., the count Amicus II of Molfetta) including other Guiscard's nephews, Robert of Montescaglioso and Geoffroi of Conversano, humbly asked him for forgiveness. Another determined opponent was the prince Jordan I of Kapua (1078–1090). For the whole course of rebellions of 1079 and 1080, see Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 252–256. Robert of Montescaglioso died shortly afterward on 26 July 1080. Errico Cuozzo, "La nobiltà normanna nel Mezzogiorno all'epoca di Roberto il Guiscardo," *Roberto il Guiscardo tra Europa, Oriente e Mezzogiorno – Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio, Potenza-Melfi-Venosa, 19–23 ottobre 1985*, ed. by Cosimo Damiano Fonseca (Galatina: Congedo, 1990), 106.

<sup>120</sup>Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 424.

<sup>121</sup>*Alexias*, I.12.7. (p. 41); Malaterra, 579–580; Lupus Protospatharius, 45; Chalandon, *Essai*, 63; Loud, *Guiscard*, 214; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 47.

<sup>122</sup>Chalandon, *Essai*, 63; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 265. For this, see also *Alexias*, I.12.8. (p. 50).

<sup>123</sup>*Gesta*, 208.

St. Peter to the Norman duke as a symbolic token of support of the whole expedition.<sup>124</sup>

To wage an expedition against the then European superpower, Robert Guiscard certainly planned to summon as strong a military force as possible to maximize his chances of success. However, the final size of his expeditionary host was significantly limited by two factors. The first was the fact that the duke could not abandon his territories in southern Italy completely unprotected and, therefore, had to leave sufficient military forces at home to cope with possible rebellions or hostile inroads from abroad. The second factor was the number of transport vessels available to him and thus the transport capacity of the Norman fleet, which started to gather in Otranto in March 1081.<sup>125</sup> However, based on the primary sources, it is actually impossible to come to an exact number of vessels. For example, William of Apulia in his *Gesta* says that the fleet had fifty warships (oared longships)<sup>126</sup> but provides no information of other types of ships (or transport roundships, which are of course the most interesting in this context), except for a brief mentioning that some merchant ships came to aid the Norman duke from as far as Dalmatia (from the port of Ragusa, today's Dubrovnik, Croatia).<sup>127</sup> Anna Komnene claims that Guiscard's fleet included various types of ships (merchant and transport roundships, oared

<sup>124</sup> Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 265; Chalandon, *Essai*, 63; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 140; Mario Gallina, "La 'Precrociata' di Roberto il Guiscardo: un'ambigua definizione," *Il Mezzogiorno normanno-svevo e le crociate*, ed. by Giosue Musca (Bari: Dedalo, 2002), 41–43. Since the pope Gregory VII considered Nikeforos III Botaneiates a usurper, he excommunicated him. Nicol, *Venice*, 55. Thanks to the pope's symbolic gesture, Guiscard gained a reputation of a forerunner of the First Crusaders heading east a decade and a half later. For this, see Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 43.

<sup>125</sup> *Gesta*, 210; Malaterra, 580, 582; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 436. Anna Komnene once refers to Otranto as the rallying point for the expedition, yet elsewhere mentions the port of Brindisi. *Alexias*, I.16.1. (p. 50). Infantry probably began gathering in Otranto a little earlier, but not before December 1080, when Guiscard was still in Melfi. Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 266.

<sup>126</sup> *Gesta*, 214, "*decies et quinque liburnis Adria sulcatur*." The use of the archaic name of the Roman oared warship—*liburna*—to refer to these ships implies that they were combat longships based structurally on the Byzantine dromons rather than transport vessels. See also Matthew Bennett, "Norman Naval Activity in the Mediterranean c. 1060-c.1108," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993): 49; Charles D. Stanton, "The Use of Naval Power in the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy and Sicily," *Haskins Society Journal* 19 (2007): 129.

<sup>127</sup> *Gesta*, 210, "*Dalmaticas naves oneri dux eligit*"; Ralph B. Yewdale, *Bohemond I: Prince of Antioch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), 12.

galleys, etc.)<sup>128</sup> and that it numbered 150 vessels.<sup>129</sup> Guiscard must have deployed the maximum number of ships available, as there was no reason to leave a certain part of the fleet as a back-up in home waters. Malaterra also provides additional information that the reconnaissance squadron sent before the main part of the expedition sailed to Korfu consisted of fifteen ships,<sup>130</sup> but it is not possible to ascertain from his account whether they were oared warships or just merchant roundships, which makes this information actually unimportant for a more accurate determination of the size of the Norman forces.<sup>131</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary to establish estimates of the size of the Norman host directly from reports concerning its numerical strength. Unfortunately, preserved written sources do not abound with too much data in this respect. Yet, there is an important piece of information in Malaterra that

<sup>128</sup> *Alexias*, I.15.1. (p. 49), “ὅσαι τὲ φορτίδες ἦσαν καὶ ὅσαι μακροὶ καὶ πολεμιστήριοι.” Anna Komnene also reports that there were 200 men on board of each ship with their armaments and a corresponding number of horses. *Alexias*, I.16.1. (p. 50–51). The Byzantine princess does not distinguish here between merchant vessels and those specifically designed for the transport of horses. Such specialized vessels have been referred to since the twelfth century by the Arabic term *tarida* (or *uscieri*, *buisier*) because they were also equipped with ramps located at the stern, which allowed horses to be disembarked from the ship directly to the shore. It is believed that each ship designed for horse transport could carry about twenty horses on board. Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 48–50. This could mean that of the 100 transport vessels, 65 would also carry horses in their hull for 1300 knights. See text below.

<sup>129</sup> *Alexias*, I.16.1. (p. 50–51); Alexandrís, Δύναμις, 316; “Naval Activity,” 50; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 437.

<sup>130</sup> Malaterra, 582.

<sup>131</sup> See also Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 179, note 1 in Chap. 1. However, it is possible that these were merchant vessels, as they also carried a detachment of soldiers on board, but they did not disembark for the fear of being outnumbered by the Byzantine forces on the island and instead settled for exploring the coast of Korfu from a respectful distance. Malaterra, 582. See also text below.

the core of Guiscard's expeditionary forces consisted of 1300 knights.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, Anna Komnene states that the entire Norman host (both cavalry and infantry) was 30,000 men strong,<sup>133</sup> the Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis asserts that the duke had only a third of this number at his disposal,<sup>134</sup> and the annalist of the Montecassino monastery, Peter Diaconus, gives a total number of 15,000 men.<sup>135</sup> If we confront this data with the data concerning the number of ships (a maximum of 150 vessels,<sup>136</sup> of which there were 50 oared warships and the remaining 100 transport vessels, each with 200 soldiers on board), the numerical strength of the entire Norman host aboard would amount to approximately 20,000 men. Anna Komnene's total thus seems to be inflated, and the actual number of Norman soldiers fluctuated between 10,000 and 20,000 men. Given the fact that Guiscard was unable to rally the full number of potentially available soldiers for the expedition against the Byzantine Empire due to the permanent threat of a rebellion against his rule in Apulia and the ongoing operations in Sicily,<sup>137</sup> Diaconus' figure of circa 15,000 men seems to be the most probable.<sup>138</sup> The Norman host certainly also included

<sup>132</sup> Malaterra, 583; Chalandon, *Essai*, 65; Loud, *Guiscard*, 214; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 437; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 143. Malaterra's number of 1300 knights seems to be realistic also because he wrote his account shortly after the actual events. It also corresponds to the total number of approx. 3000 knights the Normans of Mezzogiorno were able to assemble before the battle of Civitate in June 1053, when the threat of papal intervention forced them to join forces. *Gesta*, 260. It is likely that the total number of heavy cavalry, which Guiscard had as the duke of Apulia and Calabria nearly three decades later at his hand, was similar. However, their number was probably slightly higher, given the steady influx of new Norman adventurers after 1053 as well as Guiscard's territorial gains (e.g., the principality of Salerno with all its resources in 1077). Thus, 1300 knights could theoretically represent about a third of the total number, with another third available for the campaign in Sicily led by Guiscard's younger brother Roger and the last third left by Guiscard in southern Italy to prevent any rebellions against his son Roger Borsa. However, it is possible that the part of the forces destined for Sicily eventually remained in Apulia, as after 1079, following the conquest of Taormina, the fighting had died down on the island for some time, and the Normans focused on consolidation of their territorial gains. A new round of hostilities erupted there only after Guiscard's death in 1085. See Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 354, 370–371; Alexandris, *Δύναμις*, 313.

<sup>133</sup> *Alexias*, I.16.1. (p. 51); Chalandon, *Essai*, 65.

<sup>134</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 16; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 437; Chalandon, *Essai*, 65.

<sup>135</sup> Diaconus, 785–786; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 437; Chalandon, *Essai*, 65.

<sup>136</sup> Anna Komnene seems to have exaggerated this figure a little.

<sup>137</sup> Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 424.

<sup>138</sup> Chalandon and Yewdale lean toward this view. Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 268, Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 12.

diverse groups of mercenaries,<sup>139</sup> military entourages of individual Norman counts,<sup>140</sup> Salernitan militias,<sup>141</sup> various knightly adventurers from the French-speaking regions of western Europe,<sup>142</sup> some of whom came directly from Normandy,<sup>143</sup> and, last but not least, infantry made up of

<sup>139</sup> Guiscard used them for the domination of Apulia and Calabria. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 39–40. Therefore, their participation in this campaign is more than likely. Pounteses, known from the *Alexiad*, could be the commander of mercenaries. See note 142. Guiscard's feverish quest to win over more mercenaries could also be linked to the marriage of his two other daughters to noblemen with high military potential (the first groom was Raimund/Ramon II Berengar of Barcelona and the other Ebles II of Roucy, northwest of Reims in today's France). See *Alexias*, I.12.11. (p. 43); Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 283; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, tab. VIII.

<sup>140</sup> See text below.

<sup>141</sup> See text below.

<sup>142</sup> These include a certain Peter, the son of Alifa, the count of Pounteses, or even the *comestabulus* of Apulia, Bryennios. The last figure has nothing to do with Nikeforos Bryennios, the husband of Anna Komnene and the grandson of the rebel against Nikeforos III Botaneiates in 1078. *Alexias*, V.5.1. ff (p. 153, 157–158, 161, 168–170); *Gesta*, 236. *Briennus comestabulus* is also known from a charter, witnessing Roger Borsa's donations to the Montecassino monastery and to the bishop of Melfi in 1090. His wife was Orabila, and he died sometime before 1112. In his list of Norman nobility, Ménager puts him among the Bretons. See Ménager, "Inventaire," 393. Another option is Bryennios' connection with the family of Brienne of Champagne (specifically, as one of the four sons of the count Gautier I of Brienne, namely the youngest one, Gui), but this remains only speculative for now. For the history of the family of Brienne, see François A. Chesnaye DesBois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1771), 198. The aforementioned Peter, the son of Alifa, is traditionally identified with Peter of Aulps (today's Aups in Provence, France). Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 266–268; Ménager, "Inventaire," 402. Pounteses is usually associated with the count Raoul of Pontoise (a town in today's northwestern France), who spent part of his life in Anglo-Saxon England as the count of Hereford, but after the conquest of England by William the Conqueror in 1066, he was forced to leave the country. For the fate of Raoul of Pontoise, see Charles Du Cange, *Histoire de l'état de la ville d'Amiens et de ses comtes* (Amiens: Duval et Herment, 1840), 171–175. According to another theory, Pounteses probably came from a town on the Apennine Peninsula with the Italian word *Ponte* in its name. Cheynet, "Le rôle des Occidentaux dans l'armée byzantine avant la Première Croisade," *Byzanz und das Abendland im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Evangelos Konstantinou (Köln: Böhlau, 1997), 123. Either way, this could make him the commander of one of the mercenary groups in Guiscard's host.

<sup>143</sup> Robert Giffard and William of Grandmesnil are mentioned as the most important Normans, "*aliqui probissimi tirones*." Orderic Vitalis, 16. The latter later married Mabila, one of Guiscard's daughters (sometime between 1082–1084) and received Rossano in Calabria. Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 283; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 34; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, tab. VIII; Ménager, "Inventaire," 336; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 253.

peasant levies from Apulia and Calabria recruited just prior to the campaign.<sup>144</sup>

The commander-in-chief of the entire expedition was naturally Guiscard himself. He chose his eldest son Bohemund to accompany him on the expedition as his second-in-command.<sup>145</sup> In the spring of 1081, he reconfirmed his younger son from his marriage to Sikelgaita, Roger Borsa, as the heir of his ducal title in Calabria and Apulia and left him in charge of Salerno, appointing two of his loyal companions as advisers—Gerard of Buonalbergo and Robert of Loritello.<sup>146</sup> In addition to Bohemund, another son to accompany Guiscard to Epirus was Guido and out of his numerous nephews Richard the Seneschal.<sup>147</sup> Guiscard's wife Sikelgaita surprisingly also prepared for the expedition, but her presence in the campaign was far from being self-serving—as the sister of the last Salernitan ruler Gisulf II, she was to ensure the allegiance of all those troops in Guiscard's host who came from Salerno.<sup>148</sup> Further, the presence of Amicus II of Giovinazzo or Molfetta and his retinue was also unexpected, as this Norman count was one of the active participants in the recent rebellion against Guiscard.<sup>149</sup> Being a political realist, the Norman duke may have weakened his own military command on the one hand, but on the other, he tried to prevent one of the principal former adversaries from staying in Apulia in his absence and plotting intrigues or taking part in another rebellion. At the same time, count Amicus II could serve as a kind of hostage and guarantee the good conduct of other rebel leaders from 1078 to 1080 (namely, prince Jordan of Kapua, Geoffroi of Conversano, Henri of Monte Sant'Angelo, and Peter II of Tarent)<sup>150</sup> who evidently did

<sup>144</sup> *Gesta*, 210, 224; Orderic Vitalis, 16; *Alexias*, I.14.1. (p. 47). The inhabitants of the Calabrian town of Cosenza are mentioned as supposedly fast runners and therefore served as messengers. *Gesta*, 230.

<sup>145</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 16–18; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 113.

<sup>146</sup> *Gesta*, 214; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 267–268; Loud, *Guiscard*, 217; Ménager, “Inventaire,” 339.

<sup>147</sup> Loud, *Guiscard*, 218.

<sup>148</sup> Eads, “Sichelgaita,” 85.

<sup>149</sup> Anna Komnene calls him Amiketes and describes him in a particularly positive light, which is very suspicious, since he belonged to the enemy party. It is possible that Amicus II of Giovinazzo actually maintained a secret connection with the Byzantines, which is further supported by his involvement in the rebellion against Guiscard (which, among other things, served not only his own, but also the Byzantine interests). See *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132), “κόμης δὲ οὗτος τῶν ἐπιφανῶν, γενναῖος χεῖρα καὶ γνώμην.”

<sup>150</sup> See Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 252–253; Loud, *Guiscard*, 217.



not take part in the campaign against the Byzantine Empire and could potentially cause many inconveniences to Roger Borsa. Other participants mentioned by name are a certain Fortimundus (Fortino) of Rossano in Calabria,<sup>151</sup> as well as three individuals Rainald, William, and Sarakenos entitled as “couts.”<sup>152</sup> The list of professional military commanders is completed by the count of Brienne.<sup>153</sup>

In addition to military preparations, the Norman duke also sought to secure his campaign against Byzantium by diplomatic means, in particular through the newly acquired cordial relations with the pope Gregory VII.<sup>154</sup> During the final stage of military preparations, Guiscard also sent a

<sup>151</sup> Malaterra, 585. Fortimundus of Rossano was certainly not a random or low-significant participant in the expedition, as later Guiscard entrusted him with the administration of the conquered Dyrrachion. Since a little later (sometime between 1082 and 1084) Guiscard left Rossano to his son-in-law William of Grandmesnil (see note 143), there is a presumption that Fortimundus did not return to southern Italy, and either died during the war or entered the service of the Byzantine emperor after the fall of Dyrrachion or Kastoria. The presence of a nobility representative of Calabria among the Normans of Apulia is a bit of an anomaly, so the question arises as to whether he did not command peasant levies from Calabria.

<sup>152</sup> Since William, Rainald, and Sarakenos are mentioned only by Anna Komnene (*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153)) and as it is difficult to trace their connection to the known noble Norman or Lombard families of Mezzogiorno, it is very likely that they did not hold any real county titles and rather represented less-noble knights or even low-born adventurers, who participated in Guiscard’s campaign with a vision of their own social rise (for this, see also Loud, *Guiscard*, 217–218). The name of Sarakenos also sounds very “non-Norman” and by its nature rather resembles a nickname (*nom de guerre*). In my opinion, this premise is also reflected in the cruel way of punishing William and Rainald after Bohemund revealed their betrayal (he blinded them). In contrast, Pounteses, the main conspirator (perhaps count Raoul of Pontoise), escaped his fate by defecting (or being allowed to defect?) to Alexios Komnenos (*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153)). Sarakenos met the same cruel fate as William and Rainald—after being captured by the Byzantine army at Moglena, *meGas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos had him executed (*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153)), whereas the count of Brienne was treated much more generously under similar conditions by the Byzantine conqueror of Kastoria, Georgios Palaiologos (Palaiologos allowed him to leave freely on the basis of the honorable condition that he would never raise weapons against the Byzantine Empire again). See *Alexias*, VI.1.4. (p. 170).

<sup>153</sup> See note 142.

<sup>154</sup> There are also signs of diplomatic contacts with Serbian princes of Duklja (Diokleia) Mihailo and his son and successor Constantine Bodin, as well as with the commander-in-chief of the province of Dyrrachion, who was at the time general Georgios Monomachatos, appointed after the successful suppression of Bryennios’ and Basilakios’ rebellions by Nikeforos III Botaneiates. See text below.

mission to Constantinople,<sup>155</sup> led by the emissary Raoul, son of Dagobert,<sup>156</sup> who was to present Nikeforos III Botaneiates stipulations concerning the rights of his daughter Helena.<sup>157</sup> While the Byzantines could not fully satisfy the ultimate demands of the Norman duke, they at least managed to question their legitimacy by allowing Raoul to meet the true ex-emperor Michael VII Doukas, who lived as a monk in one of the Constantinopolitan monasteries at that time.<sup>158</sup> On their way back to southern Italy, the Norman envoys learned about the deposition of Nikeforos III Botaneiates. The new emperor Alexios Komnenos immediately restored the succession rights of the then seven-year-old Michael's son Constantine, though no longer those of Guiscard's daughter (who was now better treated and brought back to the palace),<sup>159</sup> removing thus, at least in part, the reasons used by Guiscard as a pretext for armed intervention. Of course, Alexios Komnenos made sure that this news reached the Norman emissaries before arriving in Italy.<sup>160</sup> Upon his return to Otranto, Raoul informed Guiscard of the new state of affairs and attempted to discourage him from carrying out the expedition. Guiscard became so furious that Raoul chose to urgently remove himself from the duke's presence<sup>161</sup>—he joined Bohemund, who in the meanwhile sailed with the vanguard squadron to Aulon on the Epirotic coast. There he decided to change sides and returned back to Constantinople.<sup>162</sup> It is highly likely that by sending the diplomatic mission, Guiscard did not actually aim to strengthen or implement his legitimate demands peacefully, but apparently, just before the

<sup>155</sup> Messengers were sent either during the summer and autumn of 1080 or in the first quarter of 1081. See Kislinger, "Notizen," 128–129.

<sup>156</sup> Raoul later settled permanently in Byzantium, where he founded a Byzantine aristocratic family of Ralles. See Raymond Janin, "Les Francs au service des Byzantins," *EO* 29 (1930): 68; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 270–271; Cheynet, "Occidentaux," 124.

<sup>157</sup> The second and secret objective of this mission was probably to obtain as much sensitive information as possible in the Byzantine imperial court. Chalandon, *Essai*, 64.

<sup>158</sup> *Alexias*, I.15.4. (p. 49); Chalandon, *Essai*, 64; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 41, 48.

<sup>159</sup> *Gesta*, 212; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 113.

<sup>160</sup> *Alexias*, I.15.4. (p. 49); Buckler, *Comnena*, 452.

<sup>161</sup> Janin, "Francs," 68; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 48. Another reason for Guiscard's anger was the fact that Raoul's brother Roger changed sides and fled to the Byzantines (presumably to Dyrrachion and from there apparently to the Byzantine capital), revealing them everything he knew about the forthcoming attack. *Alexias*, I.15.5. (p. 50). For his merits, Roger later probably received the high court title of *sebastos*, married a woman of the Dalassenoi family, and thus (like his brother Raoul) became the founder of another Byzantine aristocratic family of Norman origin, the Rogerioi. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 275–278; Cheynet, "Occidentaux," 124, Note 47 in Chap. 2.

<sup>162</sup> *Alexias*, I.15.5. (p. 50); Chalandon, *Essai*, 64. See also text below.

start of the entire expedition, he attempted to leave the Byzantines in the dark about his warlike intentions as long as possible.<sup>163</sup>

### 4.3.1 *Invasion and the Battle of Dyrrachion (1081)*

From the Byzantine point of view, the war against the Normans began at the end of March of 1081 (even prior to Alexios Komnenos' ascension to the imperial throne on 1 April 1081), when a small vanguard of about fifteen vessels left the port of Otranto under Bohemund's command.<sup>164</sup> This small naval squadron was tasked with the reconnaissance and occupation of Aulon and probably also of Korfu so as to provide the main forces upon their arrival with a suitable anchorage for the whole invasion fleet and a landing place for the Norman troops. However, Bohemund failed to achieve any of the intended goals.<sup>165</sup> Two other fortresses, Jericho (now Orikon, Albania) and Kanina,<sup>166</sup> in the hinterland of Aulon probably avoided the occupation, although Anna Komnene mistakenly claims that Bohemund took all these places.<sup>167</sup> A partial redress for this initial setback was provided by the capture of the port of Butrint on the Epirotic coast.<sup>168</sup> The newly installed Byzantine emperor responded to this unpleasant news by replacing *protoproedros* Georgios Monomachatos, who was appointed by Nikeforos III Botaneiates to serve as the commander of the province

<sup>163</sup> It is clear that the rallying of the fleet and troops in Otranto could not be concealed for a long time, and the Byzantines must have known about it by January 1081, when the new commander of the entire province, Georgios Monomachatos, arrived in Dyrrachion. See *Alexias*, I.16.5. (p. 52).

<sup>164</sup> Based on the testimony of William of Apulia, Bohemund's command of the Norman reconnaissance group has been doubted, see Kislinger, "Notizen," 129. This fleet probably consisted of fifteen vessels, as mentioned in Malaterra, 582; Stanton, *Operations*, 51.

<sup>165</sup> Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 48–49. According to Malaterra, the Normans did not even try to attack the island because the local garrison outnumbered them and only settled for exploration from a safe distance. See Malaterra, 582.

<sup>166</sup> Kanina was an acropolis or a fortified refuge for the residents of the nearby town of Aulon. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 40–41.

<sup>167</sup> *Alexias*, I.13.4. (p. 48). The fact that Aulon and the aforementioned key fortresses were seized is uncertain. According to William of Apulia, they were captured in early June 1081 after Guiscard's main forces marched nearby during their move north to Dyrrachion. See *Gesta*, 216; Malaterra, 583; Kislinger, "Notizen," 130.

<sup>168</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 72; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 268; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 114; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 49; Stanton, *Operations*, 51.

(*doukato*) of Dyrrachion probably in January 1081,<sup>169</sup> by another even more capable general, who was his close relative and a friend—*kouropalates* Georgios Palaiologos.<sup>170</sup> This excellent military commander took up his new post before the end of May 1081<sup>171</sup> and immediately began with the preparations of the port and especially Dyrrachion itself for defense against the invaders.<sup>172</sup> Palaiologos' arrival and his subsequent measures significantly increased the morale of the city's population over a short period of time.

The main forces under Guiscard's command set sail from Otranto on the morning of 20 May 1081. Surprisingly, the Normans did not head

<sup>169</sup> Kislinger, "Notizen," 131. *Cursus honorum* of Georgios Monomachatos is also sufficiently documented from sigillographic material. See, for example, Jean-Claude Cheynet, Cecile Morrisson, and Werner Seibt, eds. *Sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1991), 145, 147; Ivan Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria*, vol. 3, part 1 Text (Sofia: Agato, 2009), 485–486. His seal from the time when he was the commander of the province of Dyrrachion (*prōtoproedros kai doux Dyrrachion*) has been published, too. See Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou and Werner Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegeln in Österreich*, vol. 2, Zentral und Provinzverwaltung (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 264. The circumstances of his appointment to this position are described in detail by Anna Komnene. *Alexias*, I.16.5. (p. 51–52). Following Alexios Komnenos' successful coup, Georgios Monomachatos did not show too much willingness to cooperate with the new regime in Constantinople and appears to have secretly negotiated with Guiscard. *Gesta*, 217; *Alexias*, I.16.5. (p. 52); Ducellier, *Albanie*, 96–97; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 362–363; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 116; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 146.

<sup>170</sup> *Alexias*, III.12.2. (p. 116); Chalandon, *Essai*, 67; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 267; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 48. Georgios Palaiologos' wife was Anna, sister of the empress Eirene Doukaina, Alexios Komnenos' wife. He also played one of the key roles during the Komnenian coup. For his entire career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 99–105. He is known not only from written sources, but also from found lead seals (some from the territory of present-day Bulgaria). See, for example, Ivan Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria*, vol. 2, Byzantine Seals with Family Names (Sofia: Agato, 2006), 326–329; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue*, 41; Jean Francois Vannier, "Les premiers Paléologues: Etude généalogique et prosopographique," *Etudes prosopographiques*, ed. by Cheynet and Vannier, Byzantina Sorbonensia 5 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986), 123–187.

<sup>171</sup> According to William of Apulia, Georgios Palaiologos only managed to arrive in Dyrrachion in the first half of June 1081, shortly before the Normans appeared under the walls of the city. *Gesta*, 217. However, this statement contradicts Anna Komnene's claim that Guiscard had been aware of Palaiologos' arrival in Dyrrachion already before the main part of the Norman fleet set sail from Otranto on 20 May 1081. *Alexias*, III.12.2. (p. 117). In his recent study, Kislinger leans toward the chronological data from the pen of the Byzantine princess. Kislinger, "Notizen," 131.

<sup>172</sup> Of course, Palaiologos' main focus was on repairing and improving the fortifications. *Alexias*, III.9.5. (p. 111); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 116.

across the Strait of Otranto directly to Dyrrachion, but chose the shortest route possible and crossed the narrowest point of the strait (only about 72 kilometers)<sup>173</sup> and headed to Cape Glossa, with the aim to extend the foothold on the Epirotic coast seized by Bohemund and conquer the island of Korfu, which had successfully resisted so far. Therefore, the Normans landed first on the north coast of Korfu at the anchorage near Kassiope and then besieged the main island fortress (also called Korfu).<sup>174</sup> The Byzantine garrison surrendered the next day, and the island's residents pledged to pay the Normans regular tributes after providing hostages.<sup>175</sup> Consequently, the Normans occupied the port of Bonditza on the south coast of the Ambrakian Gulf, which they, in revenge for the stout resistance of the inhabitants of this fortress, plundered and burned down.<sup>176</sup> The last to seize was a very important port of Aulon.<sup>177</sup> All these operations, both at sea and on land, met with lukewarm Byzantine resistance, as both the Norman naval and ground forces far exceeded the local defense capabilities of the provinces of

<sup>173</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 114.

<sup>174</sup> *Historia Sicula*, 769. The capital of Korfu (*Koryfō*) was about two kilometers north of its ancient predecessor and was fortified in the Byzantine period (probably as early as the eighth century). In addition to the wall-protected area, it also included two suburbs of Anemopylos and Palaiopolis. Malamut, *Îles*, vol. 1, 183. The port of Kassiope, located deep in the bay lined with two promontories, providing thus a natural and safe anchorage, has been called by this name since the late ancient period. In the eleventh century, it was protected by a smaller fortress (*kastron*). See Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 172; Veikou, *Epirus*, 54; Malamut, *Îles*, vol. 1, 185.

<sup>175</sup> *Gesta*, 214; Malaterra, 583; Chalandon, *Essai*, 73; Aléxios G. C. Savvídīs, *Τα βυζαντινά Επτάνησα 11<sup>ος</sup> – αρχές 13<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα. Το ναυτικό θέμα Κεφαλληνίας στην Υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο* (Athens, 1986), 20–21.

<sup>176</sup> *Geste*, 214; Prinzling, “Epirus,” 9; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 115. For the port of Bonditza (Vonitza), the name of which is derived from the Slavic word *Vodica* (*udica* means “fishing rod”), see Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 128–129. For more detailed information on the fortress, the origins of which date back to the ninth century, see Veikou, *Epirus*, 53, 144, 279, 287, 513–515.

<sup>177</sup> *Gesta*, 216; Malaterra, 583. There were several reasons for the strategic importance of Aulon at the beginning of the whole campaign. It lay closest to Otranto, the starting point of the entire Norman fleet, so the sailing time across the Strait of Otranto was very short. Furthermore, it was situated in a deep and large bay, protected from the waves by the massif of the Isle of Sazan (Suseno) and the Karaburun peninsula (Cape Glossa), which provided a safe anchorage to even the largest transport vessels. Chalandon, *Essai*, 64–65; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 165; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 129–130. Another reason for the establishment of the foothold precisely here was that it was a fertile land, which undoubtedly had a positive impact on the supply of the Norman host. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 60–61.

Dyrrachion and Nikopolis.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, the change on the imperial throne played into Guiscard's hands, as the newly installed emperor Alexios Komnenos obviously would have to first consolidate his power in Constantinople and leave the problems in other parts of the empire aside until later.

Indeed, Alexios Komnenos was unable to respond to the Norman threat immediately.<sup>179</sup> The Norman invasion was just one of many internal and external problems which kept him busy in the first hours and days after his ascension to the imperial throne. Moreover, the overall situation was further complicated by the deep economic crisis into which the Byzantine Empire gradually sunk during the second half of the eleventh

<sup>178</sup>For the maritime forces of the province of Dyrrachion before 1081, see note 244 in Chap. 2. It has been argued that in 1081, the Epirotic coastline (and similarly the southern coast of the province of Nikopolis) was not protected by any local fleet, see Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 179–180; Ducellier, *Albanie*, 102; Böhm, *Flota*, 104. On the other hand, Theotokis believes that there was a local fleet, but composed only of small and light vessels which could not equal the Norman galleys at sea. This interpretation does not contradict the factual inaction of the Byzantine navy in the early stages of the conflict. See Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 147. As far as ground forces are concerned, there were certainly local garrisons in charge of maintaining order in the area. Their exact size cannot be more accurately determined from the sources, but it is clear that these forces could not equal those of the attackers. Moreover, there was a *tagma* (a unit of the regular army, probably part of the *pente esperia tagmata* mentioned above) still based in the province of Dyrrachion. This unit was mentioned *sub anno* 1078 as part of the rebel army controlled by *magistros* and *doux Dyrrachiou* Nikeforos Basilakios. See Bryennios, 283: “τοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰλλυρικῷ παντὸς στρατεύματος.” However, it is unclear whether this *tagma* constituted a unit only from the province of Dyrrachion or from the whole area of the former late ancient Illyrikum (including the provinces of Dalmatia and Nikopolis). See Kühn, *Armee*, 236–237. After the suppression of Basilakios' rebellion, this unit apparently returned to its home province (but there is no mention of it in the sources) and, thus, was available in 1081 to Georgios Monomachatos and Georgios Palaiologos, respectively, in defense against the Normans. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 363. However, since this unit did not exceed several thousand men (see note 170 in Chap. 2), it clearly did not pose any serious obstacles to the attacking Normans and, as such, probably only partially reinforced the Dyrrachion defenders. For the assumption that the aforementioned *tagma* under Palaiologos' leadership supplemented the ranks of city defenders, see *Gesta*, 216: “... *multos Palaiologus Argos Dirachium duxit, ...*”

<sup>179</sup>If we take the narration of Anna Komnene literally, Alexios Komnenos was in no position to deal with any kind of state affairs prior to mid-May 1081. He could do so only after the end of the forty-day fasting and repentance imposed on himself for the three-day looting of the capital of Constantinople by his troops after the successful military coup. *Alexias*, III.5.5. (p. 99–100).

century.<sup>180</sup> The acute lack of funds made it impossible to quickly remedy the poor state of the Byzantine army and, worse still, the alarming state of the Byzantine fleet, which were essential tools to stop aggressive enemies from attacking the shrinking imperial territory. In addition to the Normans, there were also the Pechenegs who raided parts of the Byzantine Balkans for most of the eleventh century,<sup>181</sup> and political ties between the center in Constantinople and local rulers in other regions of the realm (on the so-called *Slavic periphery*) started to erode.<sup>182</sup> However, the biggest crisis was already taking place in Asia Minor, where, as a result of the battle of Manzikert and consequent hostilities, large areas quickly became the subjects of the fast-growing Rum Seljuk sultanate with its new capital in Nikaia. Although the situation in Asia Minor was not as gloomy as portrayed by Anna Komnene in the *Alexiad*,<sup>183</sup> it could be assumed that if the Byzantines had not counterattacked shortly, temporary losses of territories would very likely become permanent and the Seljuks would also take over those areas in Asia Minor, which, even though separated from other

<sup>180</sup> For a comprehensive overview of possible causes and the course of the economic or fiscal crisis, see Angold, “Belle époque or crisis? (1025–1118),” 590–598. One of the most visible signs of crisis was the gradual devaluation of the Byzantine gold coin *nomisma*. See note 200.

<sup>181</sup> For a brief overview, see Angold, *Empire*, 37–40; Geórgios T. Kólias, “Η έξωτερική πολιτική Ἀλεξίου Ἀ Κομνηνοῦ (1081–1118),” *Athéna* 59 (1955): 242. See also text below.

<sup>182</sup> During the 1070s, these trends were manifested in the Balkan areas, such as Duklja/Diokleia and Zeta, Bulgaria, and Croatia (or Dalmatia). See Stephenson, *Frontier*, 117–147.

<sup>183</sup> For example, *Alexias*, III.9.1. (p. 109): “ἀσπαίρουσαν (...) τὴν βασιλείαν (καὶ γὰρ τὰ μὲν πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἦλιον οἱ Τοῦρκοι δεινῶς ἐληίζοντο...)”; or, in particular, *Alexias*, III.1.1. (p. 114–115); Cheynet, “Résistance,” 132; Frankopan, *Crusade*, 42.

imperial territories, were still able to enjoy independence thanks to the strong local leadership.<sup>184</sup>

In the course of its long history, the Byzantine Empire has practically never been able to face two or more military threats simultaneously, even in times of its greatest power and territorial expanse under the reign of the emperor Justinian I the Great (527–565). It is a well-known fact that the spectacular Justinian's military achievements in the western Mediterranean were only made possible by the conclusion of the "eternal peace" with the Persian Empire in 532.<sup>185</sup> Alexios Komnenos and his closest allies and advisers were well aware of this fact when considering the strategic and military situation of the Byzantine state in April and

<sup>184</sup> Anna Komnene mentions some areas in Asia Minor that were still under direct Byzantine control at the beginning of her father's reign, thus actually contradicting her own earlier claims. She specifically mentions Paflagonia with the center in Herakleia Pontike, the town of Choma with its surroundings in Frygia, Kappadokia, as well as other unspecified areas. *Alexias*, III.9.3. (p. 110); Chalandon, *Essai*, 66. The list of regions that in the spring of 1081 still resisted the Seljuk pressure, although they were already cut off from the rest of the Byzantine Empire, comprises Trapezunt (now Trabzon, Turkey) with its hinterland, with Theodoros Gabras as the local ruler. The Byzantine Empire still formally included the town of Kaisareia (now Kayseri, Turkey) in Kappadokia, as well as Edessa (now Urfa, Turkey), which had been administered since 1078 by *patrikios* and *magistros* Basileios Apokapes. In 1083, he was replaced (the city of Edessa fell into the Seljuk hands only in 1087) by the aforementioned faithful follower of the former emperor Romanos IV Diogenes, Filaretos Brachamios, who in addition controlled a vast area from the town of Romanoupolis (now Bingöl, Turkey) to Tarsos in Kilikia in the west, with centers in Germanikeia and Melitene (now Kahranmaraş and Malatya, Turkey), and since 1079 as *doux Antiocheias* even Antioch with its surroundings, including the port of Laodikeia (until December 1084). By 1081, in an attempt to gain his loyalty, Alexios Komnenos bestowed Brachamios with the title of *sebastos* and appointed him as the *domestikos* of the East (although *eastern tagmata* were no longer in existence by then); he held the title until his death in 1090. In other words, in 1081, the Byzantine Empire in the East still formally controlled vast territories in the form of the southern half of its former eastern border with its hinterland, as well as most of the coastline of the Black, Aegean, and Mediterranean seas. The Seljuk bands were mainly located inland, most of which settled in western Asia Minor (ancient Thynia and Bithynia), where the aforementioned Rum sultanate with the center in Nikaia under the leadership of Kutlumuş' sons Manşūr and especially Süleyman began to emerge in the late eleventh century. See Frankopan, *Crusade*, 42–43; Kühn, *Armee*, 180, 186, 200–201; Leveniōtis, *Κατάρρευση Α'*, 215, 249–250, 269, 286–291, 301–303, 308–313, 344–351, 380, 384–385, 398–403, 416–417; Cheynet, "Résistance," 132–134; 141–144, 147.

<sup>185</sup> See Charálabos Papasotiriou, *Βυζαντινή υψηλή στρατηγική, 6<sup>ος</sup>–11<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας* (Athens: Ekdóseis Poiótita, 2000), 72–73; Walter E. Kaegi, "Byzantine Logistics: Problems and Perspectives," *Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by John A. Lynn (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 41, 51.



May 1081.<sup>186</sup> The young emperor had to set priorities as soon as possible and decide which of the developing external threats to face first. The Pechenegs posed a relatively least urgent danger to the Byzantines, as their raids in Makedonia and Thrace were unpleasant, but after some time these nomads always returned to their settlements in the province of Paradounavon. In October 1080, Alexios' predecessor, Nikeforos III Botaneiates concluded a peace treaty with them confirming the *status quo*, which was still in force in the spring of the following year.<sup>187</sup> In Asia Minor, the Seljuk Turks posed a seemingly similar threat as they were also nomads. Therefore, the Byzantines considered the problems associated with their movements over Asia Minor (in particular, the interruption of communication lines between isolated Byzantine areas and the capital, the frequent devastation of rural areas, and the resulting influx of refugees filling the streets of Constantinople) only temporary and believed that the Seljuks would assimilate over time to the “higher” Christian Byzantine culture and, as mercenaries, boost the ranks of the Byzantine army, making it once again invincible.<sup>188</sup> These hopes of Byzantine elites were reinforced by the fact that several important Seljuk emirs already were, directly or indirectly, in Byzantine services during

<sup>186</sup> *Alexias*, III.11.5. (p. 116).

<sup>187</sup> John Skylitzes mentions an event before the conclusion of this treaty—lightning struck the column of the emperor Constantine—dated back to October in the third indiction (October 1080). Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 185. Therefore, the truce with the Pechenegs was probably declared only afterward. Similarly, other events reported by Skylitzes, that is, the death of the archbishop of Ochrid John (1078), the appointment of the new archbishop of Ochrid John of Aoinion (1078), the death of the patriarch of Antioch Nikeforos Mauros (1079/1080), as well as the appointment of the new commander (*doux*) of Skopje, Alexandros Kabasilas (1078), also confirm that the peace treaty was most likely concluded in 1080. Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 185. For the archbishopric of Ochrid, see Vitalien Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, vol. 5, 2: L'église (Paris: Édition du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965), 320; for the patriarchs of Antioch, see Venance Grumel, *La chronologie: Traité d'études byzantines* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 447; and for an overview of commanders of the province of Boulgaria with its seat in Skopje, see Kühn, *Armee*, 231.

<sup>188</sup> Frankopan, *Crusade*, 31, 44–45. The religious dimension also did not pose too much of a problem for the Byzantines, as the affiliation with Islam was still quite superficial and not deeply rooted for most Seljuks, and although majority of them were inclined toward the Sunni Islam, there were also supporters of the Shia branch and various other unorthodox directions of Islam. See Andrew C. S. Peacock, *Early Seljūq History: A New Interpretation* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 119.

this period,<sup>189</sup> and some of them even converted to Christianity, obtained honorary court titles, and entered the ranks of the Byzantine ruling class at the Imperial Court in Constantinople.<sup>190</sup>

In the eyes of Alexios Komnenos and the circle of his closest advisers and supporters, Robert Guiscard was a completely different case. Unlike the Pecheneg or Seljuk chieftains, he concluded a legal treaty with Michael VII Doukas, which, if fulfilled, would mean the acceptance of the Norman duke among the members of the ruling Byzantine dynasty. From this position (as the father of the future empress), he would certainly exert an influence on issues relating to succession to the imperial throne. In addition, the Roman pope Gregory VII, who considered Alexios Komnenos, just like Nikeforos III Botaneiates before him, a full-fledged usurper, also sided with the Norman duke.<sup>191</sup> This gave Guiscard's intentions a certain hallmark of legitimacy, with the help of which he could at least think of successful territorial incursions in the Byzantine Balkans, where it was possible to find many imperial subjects and local inhabitants dissatisfied with

<sup>189</sup> Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 360. Undoubtedly, the most important of them at the time was the Seljuk chief Chrysoskoulos/Arisighi/Erişgen, brother-in-law of sultan Alp Arslan, who fought in the battle of Manzikert on the side of the Byzantines and after 1078 served as the mediator between Nikeforos III Botaneiates and Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş. Charles M. Brand, "The Turkish Element in Byzantium, Eleventh-Twelfth Centuries," *DOP* 43 (1989): 2; Cahen, *Turkey*, 85.

<sup>190</sup> For more information, see Pedro Bádenas, "L'intégration des Turcs dans la société byzantine (XIe-XIIe siècles). Echecs d'un processus de coexistence," *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th cent.)*, ed. by Stelios Lampakes (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, Centre for Byzantine Research, 1998), 180–182, 185; Brand, "Element," 2, 4.

<sup>191</sup> Nicol, *Venice*, 56.

the central government in Constantinople, ready to rise and rebel.<sup>192</sup> There was also a rather distant, albeit not entirely unrealistic, possibility that if Guiscard had been able to reinstall Michael VII Doukas (authentic or false) to the imperial throne by military intervention,<sup>193</sup> he would be able to take advantage of the situation in the future and possibly reach for the imperial crown himself.<sup>194</sup> There had been enough similar precedents in the Byzantine history for Alexios Komnenos and his closest political allies not to ignore this fact. Moreover, if the Byzantines lost large parts of the Balkans, they would be deprived of the last areas where the Byzantine state apparatus was still operating relatively effectively. This would result in the loss of the last sources of funding, as well as the source of new recruits for the army, which would, in the consequence, mean the definite collapse of the Byzantine state.<sup>195</sup> Therefore, I believe that these two

<sup>192</sup>This was certainly true of the province of Dyrrachion, where in the eleventh century the Greek-speaking Byzantine population actually represented a minority concentrated mainly in the ports of Dyrrachion and Aulon and other urban centers. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 45. The Albanians with their own interests began to assert their own interests quite visibly during this period. Moreover, there was also the Slavic (Bulgarian) population, as well as the Vlachs, heavily populating Thessaly around Larissa (virtually all mountainous areas between western Macedonia, northern Thessaly and southern Epirus, as well as the Rhodopes and the Stara Planina Mountains), who could also play the role of potential Norman associates (if it suited them) against the central rule in Constantinople. For an overview of the presence of the Vlachs in the Byzantine Balkans in the eleventh century, see Gennadij G. Litavrin, “Влахи византийских источников X–XIII вв.,” *Византия и Славяне* (Sankt Petersburg, 1999), 137, 143, 145–150, 153–157, 159. In this context, it is interesting to mention that alarming news spread throughout the Byzantine Balkans in 1066 about Guiscard’s imminent attack against Dyrrachion. Eventually, the Norman duke did not attack (at the time, he did not have the necessary resources for such an event and his power position in southern Italy was still unstable), but strangely enough, in the same year, the Vlachs also rose up around Larissa in Thessaly. For the revolt itself, see Kekaumenos, 219–233; Gennadij G. Litavrin, “Восстание Болгар и Влахов в Фессалии в 1066 г.,” *ВВ* 11 (1956): 123–134. For the link between the 1066 uprising and the anticipated Norman invasion and possible later cooperation of Guiscard and Bohemund with the Vlachs during the Byzantine-Norman war, see Chalandon, *Essai*, 61; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 168–169. Another rebellion shook the Balkans in 1072, when Bulgarian nobility revolted in the vicinity of Prizren and elected Constantine Bodin, the later ruler of Diokleia/Duklja, as its new tsar (1081–1099). Stephenson, *Frontier*, 142–143.

<sup>193</sup> *Alexias*, III.9.1. (p. 109).

<sup>194</sup> See text above.

<sup>195</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 129–130; Haldon, *Wars*, 133; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 61. It is worth noting that the key supporters of the new regime among the Byzantine ruling class had most of their estates concentrated in the Balkans, which probably also played its part in Alexios Komnenos’ decision-making process. See Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 360.

reasons—political and military-economic—represented the main motivation for the Byzantine emperor to take a stand against the Norman threat first and postpone the fight against the Pechenegs and the Seljuks until it was averted. This new political line was reflected in the ensuing swift conclusion of the truce with the Seljuk sultan in Nikaia, Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş (1077/1078–1086).<sup>196</sup>

It should be noted that as soon as Alexios Komnenos made the first critical decision of his reign between April and May 1081, he immediately stopped wasting precious time and took action. Before he set off at the head of the Byzantine army to help the defenders of Dyrrachion, he had launched an intensive diplomatic campaign against the Norman duke by June 1081.<sup>197</sup> The emperor was certainly aware of the fact that Guiscard had the support of the pope Gregory VII and, therefore, with the help of several letters and subsequently through his envoy *prōtoproedros* Constantine Choirofaktes,<sup>198</sup> turned to the pope's greatest ideological opponent at the time—the Holy Roman emperor Henry IV (1056–1105). The text of the letter carried by the envoy, from which Anna Komnene later extensively quotes in her work, clearly reveals Alexios Komnenos' efforts to present Guiscard as a common enemy of all Christians and a dangerous peace-breaker.<sup>199</sup> However, when asking for help against the Normans, the Byzantine emperor did not rely only on the altruism and solidarity of his Western counterpart; he also promised Henry IV 260,000

<sup>196</sup> *Alexias*, III.1.5. (p. 116); Chalandon, *Essai*, 72; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 148. The truce was concluded by 17 June 1081. Franz Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserkunden des Oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, vol. 2, 1025–1204 (München: Beck, 1995), 24, no. 1065.

<sup>197</sup> See Tilémachos C. Lounghis, *Les ambassades byzantines en Occident depuis la fondation des états barbares jusqu'aux croisades (407–1096)* (Athens: Mihalas, 1980), 245; Dölger, *Regesten*, 25. This date corresponds to Kislinger's assumption that the Venetians started negotiations also in the first half of June 1081. Kislinger, "Notizen," 132.

<sup>198</sup> *Alexias*, III.10.2. (p. 112); Chalandon, *Essai*, 69; Dölger, *Regesten*, 25, no. 1068; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 52–54. This descendant of the highly esteemed Byzantine family is also known from uncovered sigillographic material, see Cheynet, "Les Choïrosphaktai," *SBS* 11 (2012): 101–106.

<sup>199</sup> *Alexias*, III.10.3–4. (p. 112); Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 267; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 148; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 40; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 131; Jonathan Shephard, "'Father' or 'Scorpion'? Style and Substance in Alexius' Diplomacy," *Alexios I Komnenos—Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989*, ed. by Margaret Mullet and Dion Smythe (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996), 82.

*nomismata*<sup>200</sup> (of which 44,000 was paid in silver up front),<sup>201</sup> as well as 100 pieces of silk robes, 20 court titles, including the payment of a lifetime annuity, and other luxury gifts.<sup>202</sup> In addition to the Holy Roman emperor, Alexios Komnenos also turned to the pope Gregory VII with a letter of protest,<sup>203</sup> as well as to the potentates in Mezzogiorno, including some of Guiscard's close relatives.<sup>204</sup> The aim of these activities was to destabilize Guiscard's rule in southern Italy, which could even result in a further rebellion against his rule. Given the miserable state of the Byzantine fleet described above, Alexios Komnenos asked the Republic of Venice for help in naval operations. The Venetians, headed by the doge Domenico Silvio (1071–1084), were already watching with great dismay the rapid increase of the Norman naval power in the southern Adriatic and the strengthening

<sup>200</sup> *Nomisma* was a Byzantine gold coin weighing approx. 4.5 grams with a gold purity of twenty-four carats, or 98% (silver was the secondary component). However, at the beginning of Alexios Komnenos' reign several issues of gold coins with different gold content were in circulation due to the economic problems in mid-eleventh century Byzantium. By 1071, this devaluation was not very pronounced (the gold content fell to 90.7% or 71% respectively), but then the purity of the coins gradually dropped to about eight carats, that is, below 45%. See Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999), 10; Cécile Morrisson, "La dévaluation de la monnaie byzantine au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle: essai d'interprétation," *TM* 6 (1976): 3–30; Cécile Morrisson, "Byzantine Money: Its Production and Circulation," *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 1, ed. by Angeliki Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), 932. Therefore, it is not very surprising that, when negotiating the amount of the financial "gift" to aid the emperor in the war against the Normans, not only was the total amount (260,000 *nomismata*) indicated, but also a fact that the payment would be made in coins minted either under Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), or more likely under Romanos IV Diogenes (ῥωμανάτου παλαιᾶς ποιότητος), that is, coins with a greater precious metal content than those currently in circulation. *Alexias*, III.10.4. (p. 113).

<sup>201</sup> *Alexias*, III.10.4. (p. 113). The intermediary in this diplomatic "transaction" seems to have been Abelard (see note 204). Chalandon, *Essai*, 69.

<sup>202</sup> *Alexias*, III.10.5ff (p. 113–114).

<sup>203</sup> Stephenson, *Frontier*, 166; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 40.

<sup>204</sup> Anna Komnene mentions letters to Herman, the duke of Lombardy (Herman of Canne, the half-brother of another rebellious Guiscard's nephew, Abelard, son of Guiscard's older half-brother Onfroi), who fled to the imperial court in Constantinople after the failed rebellion in 1079–1080 (see note 119), as well as to the archbishop Hervé of Capua. *Alexias*, III.10.1. (p. 112); Chalandon, *Essai*, 68; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 267; Lounghis, *Ambassadors*, 245; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 40; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 148. Jordan I, the Norman duke of Capua, who was also a former rebel of 1079–1080 and, through his mother Fressenda, Guiscard's nephew, held in many ways an equal position of power among the Norman aristocracy in Mezzogiorno as Guiscard himself.

of their ties to the main Venetian competitors—the merchants from the port of Ragusa in Dalmatia.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, the Venetians responded positively to the Byzantine emperor's call for material and financial donations and the promise of enhanced trade privileges<sup>206</sup> and immediately began preparing their fleet for action against the Normans without delay. However, the preparations took them at least until the end of July 1081.<sup>207</sup> In the end, Alexios Komnenos turned even to the Seljuk sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş, with whom he had only recently made peace, with the request to send him auxiliary troops.<sup>208</sup>

In the meantime, the Normans were not content with their initial successes and in early June 1081 set off from their foothold near Butrint northward along the Epirotic coast, this time with the aim of capturing Dyrrachion itself. The movement of the Norman host under Bohemund's leadership was followed by the Norman fleet under Guiscard's command, sailing along the coast.<sup>209</sup> Yet, at this point, the duke was struck by the first serious setback of an otherwise well-run campaign—when his fleet sailed north around Cape Glossa,<sup>210</sup> a sudden intense summer storm with strong wind gusts broke out. In result, many vessels sank, often with entire crews, while others shattered to pieces on the rocky coast.<sup>211</sup> The Normans lost considerable supplies of food, as well as most of the siege engines they

<sup>205</sup> *Gesta*, 218, 220; Malaterra, 583; Chalandon, *Essai*, 70–71; Alexandrís, Δύναμις, 317; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 168; Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 40; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 422–423; Nicol, *Venice*, 57; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 117; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 147; Stanton, *Operations*, 48–49.

<sup>206</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.2. (p. 122); Dölger, *Regesten*, 25, no. 1070; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 170.

<sup>207</sup> See Kislínger, “Notizen,” 132.

<sup>208</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.1. (p. 122); *Gesta*, 218, Malaterra, 583; Dölger, *Regesten*, 25, no. 1069. This was undoubtedly facilitated by his earlier positive experience with the Seljuks, who had already fought under his command before he took the throne in suppressing the rebellion against Nikeforos III Botaneiates. Frankopan, *Crusade*, 46.

<sup>209</sup> Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 269; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 115.

<sup>210</sup> Cape Glossa is such a dominant feature of the Albanian coast that it has represented the geographical boundary between the waters of the Aegean and the Adriatic Seas since the ancient times.

<sup>211</sup> Unfortunately, Anna Komnene does not give a specific number of sunken ships, so it is not possible to estimate to what extent the Norman fleet was weakened. *Alexias*, III.12.6. (p. 118); *Gesta*, 216; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 179; Alexandrís, Δύναμις, 316; Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 54; Loud, *Guiscard*, 215; Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 50; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 146; Böhm, *Flota*, 118; Stanton, *Operations*, 51.

intended to deploy against the walls of Dyrrachion.<sup>212</sup> Surviving sailors and soldiers took refuge in Glabinitza,<sup>213</sup> where the ground part of the expedition pitched their camp. Consequently, Guiscard interrupted his march north for a week to give his soldiers some time to recover from the hardships they had suffered, as well as to collect things cast ashore from sunken ships, repair damaged vessels, and, last but not least, bury dead bodies.<sup>214</sup> It was also necessary to restock the lost reserves of food, but with the vegetative period already being in full swing, the Normans were able to replenish their supplies by plundering the ripening harvest around quite easily.<sup>215</sup> Anna Komnene also notes that Guiscard in Glabinitza waited for reinforcements from Apulia, as well as other ships to support the weakened fleet.<sup>216</sup>

A week later, the Normans resumed their march north and on 17 June 1081 set up a camp on the plain northeast of Dyrrachion.<sup>217</sup> This location was not chosen at random as the camp was protected by a shallow lagoon from the northeast, which turned toward inland into the marshland.<sup>218</sup> A bridge arched the mouth of the lagoon to allow travelers arriving along the Via *Egnatia* to enter the city. Guiscard was thus able to concentrate all his efforts on the siege of the city without the need to set aside forces for

<sup>212</sup> *Alexias*, III.12.5. (p. 118). It was the bulky and water-soaked parts of the siege engines covered by animal hides and stocked on the decks that apparently caused most of the Norman ships to shipwreck. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 115; Alexandris, *Δύναμις*, 316.

<sup>213</sup> Ducellier identified Glabinitza with today's town of Ballsh, Albania. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 6, 21. However, this localization does not correspond too much to the fact that the rest of the Norman fleet also gathered here. Therefore, it can be assumed that Glabinitza was located either somewhere on the coast, north of Cape Glossa and in its immediate vicinity, or, as Stanton recently assumed, somewhere upstream of the Aoos (Vjosa) river, which empties into Adriatic sea just north of Cape Glossa. See Stanton, *Operations*, 52.

<sup>214</sup> *Alexias*, III.12.6. (p. 118); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 115; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 146. William of Apulia notes that the storm that caused the Norman shipwreck did not calm down immediately, but lasted for several more days—another reason for the week-long break. *Gesta*, 216.

<sup>215</sup> *Alexias*, III.12.6. (p. 118); Ducellier, “Orient,” 4; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 115.

<sup>216</sup> *Alexias*, III.12.7. (p. 118–119); Böhm, *Flota*, 118. This short report suggests that the Venetian fleet had not arrived at the Epirotic coast yet and had not blocked the Norman maritime communication and supply links to Apulia.

<sup>217</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.1. (p. 120); Chalandon, *Essai*, 74; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 151. The Norman camp was built in the area where the ruins of the ancient city of Epidamnos were still located.

<sup>218</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 116; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 151. The lagoon was still existent until the mid-twentieth century, when it was filled with earth.

the fortification of the camp and securing its defense from the direction of the lagoon (except for forces who were to guard the bridge). The Norman fleet anchored on the coast to protect the camp against a seaborne attack. After the first few days of the siege, when the Normans tried to undermine the morale of Dyrrachion defenders by building new siege machines and ostentatiously setting up a large-scale camp,<sup>219</sup> the Byzantine commander of the province of Dyrrachion, *doux* Georgios Palaiologos, sent messengers to Guiscard to formally inquire about the reason for his arrival.<sup>220</sup> The Norman duke replied that he had come to avenge the disgrace of his daughter and to reinstall Michael VII Doukas to the imperial throne.<sup>221</sup> In witness of his words, he had the aforementioned pretender Michael VII robed in splendid vestments and paraded him to the inhabitants and defenders of the city who had gathered on the ramparts. Of course, the city dwellers rejected this individual as an impostor,<sup>222</sup> which led to the resumption of hostilities. Over the next few days, the Normans tried to surmount the massive walls with the help of siege engines. Defenders, in turn, managed to destroy them one by one, either by active resistance directly from the walls or by unexpected sallies from city gates.<sup>223</sup>

In the meantime, Alexios Komnenos, concerned by Georgios Palaiologos' recent reports on the Norman advance,<sup>224</sup> was gathering troops in Constantinople with the help of written orders.<sup>225</sup> Anna Komnene notes that his efforts were seriously hampered by the lack of funds (mainly because it was not possible to obtain reinforcements in the form of other mercenary units), but also by the fact that, thanks to previous emperors, the Byzantine Empire “*had no worthwhile forces*”<sup>226</sup> and that at that moment there was only a regiment of 300 soldiers from Asia Minor called the *Chōmatēnoi* and the Varangian guard in the capital.<sup>227</sup> This rather serious claim by the Byzantine princess is not entirely true, since, in the spring of 1081, Alexios Komnenos had virtually untouched units from the entire western half of the Empire at his hand, as well as part of the imperial

<sup>219</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.2. (p. 120); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 152.

<sup>220</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.3. (p. 121).

<sup>221</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.3. (p. 121); *Gesta*, 218; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 117.

<sup>222</sup> *Alexias*, IV.1.3. (p. 121); *Gesta*, 218; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 117; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 50.

<sup>223</sup> *Gesta*, 218. During such a sortie, *doux* Georgios Palaiologos got injured, as an arrow hit his temple. Nevertheless, he did not succumb to the wound and continued fighting. *Alexias*, IV.4.4. (p. 127–128).

<sup>224</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.1. (p. 122).

<sup>225</sup> Malaterra, 583.

<sup>226</sup> *Alexias*, III.9.1. (p. 110): “μήτε στρατιάν αξιόμαχον.”

<sup>227</sup> *Alexias*, II.12.4 (p. 85–86), *Alexias*, III.9.1. (p. 110); Chalandon, *Essai*, 65.



*tagmata* stationed in Constantinople. Of course, eastern *tagmata* were already missing from the Byzantine army's battle order at this time (besides a few woeful residues such as the already mentioned *Chōmatēnoi*), as they had succumbed to gradual disintegration in the post-Manzikert period. Still, even without them, the Byzantine army was a force to be reckoned with. Primary sources suggest that the battle-ready core consisted of the *basilika tagmata* from the capital—namely, the aforementioned Varangian guard, the *Exkoubitai*,<sup>228</sup> the *Bestiaritai*,<sup>229</sup> theoretically, also the *Bigla*,<sup>230</sup> as well as the *Athanatoi*.<sup>231</sup> The Byzantine army also included mercenary

<sup>228</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126); Kühn, *Armee*, 98–99; Haldon, *Wars*, 134.

<sup>229</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127); Chalandon, *Essai*, 77; Haldon, *Wars*, 134. The *Bestiaritai* were a palace guard unit paid and maintained directly by the emperor. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150. Their participation in the military campaign reflects emperor's effort to use all available units, including those previously intended solely for ceremonial purposes.

<sup>230</sup> This unit seems to have been in existence until 1092 at the latest, as evidenced by the prosopographical data about its commanders. Between 1078 and 1081, *droungarios tēs biglēs* was a certain Stefanos. See Kühn, *Armee*, 111–112. The Byzantine historian Ioannes Skylitzes held the same position between 1085 and 1092. Cheynet, "Introduction: John Skylitzes, the Author and His Family," *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057*, transl. by John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ix–x; Gkioutzioukostas, *Δικαιοσύνη*, 135. The problem with the existence of this unit is that, since at least the mid-eleventh century, its commander, *droungarios tēs biglēs*, was primarily a high-ranking judge within the Byzantine legal hierarchy and represented the highest appellation of not only the provincial but also the Constantinopolitan courts (was even responsible for issuing certain laws and sending petitions directly to the emperor if any dispute required his personal attention), and thus ceased to be a military commander completely. Gkioutzioukostas, *Δικαιοσύνη*, 130–131, 135–136. Therefore, it can be assumed that the *Bigla* apparently did not present a full-fledged battle-worthy *tagma* at the beginning of Alexios Komnenos' reign (if it still existed, which might indicate a reference in Anna Komnene's text associated with the events at the beginning of 1091, see note 479 in Chap. 5). The *Scholai* and other troops known prior to the battle of Manzikert may have ceased to exist as a result of the losses suffered in this battle. See text above.

<sup>231</sup> Even in 1080, the emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates appeared to have deployed the Immortals in Asia Minor against the Seljuks. Attaleiates, 306. Based on the primary sources, this unit existed until 1092 at the latest, as it is mentioned in connection with the rebellion against Alexios Komnenos in Cyprus, see *Alexias*, IX.2.4. (p. 263); Kühn, *Armee*, 245–246; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 367.

units, in particular, the Franks (the Normans),<sup>232</sup> the Alans,<sup>233</sup> and the Germans.<sup>234</sup>

Like Robert Guiscard, Alexios Komnenos was understandably unable to summon all the Byzantine troops to accompany him in the military expedition, as it was necessary to keep the garrison to protect the capital,<sup>235</sup> as well as troops to defend territories that were still subject to the Byzantines in Asia Minor.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, in August 1081,<sup>237</sup> the Byzantine

<sup>232</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127). It has been convincingly proven that the name *Φράγγοι/Κέλτοι*, which Anna Komnene repeatedly uses in her historical work, refers mostly to the Normans, see Kazhdan, “Latins and Franks in Byzantium: Perception and Reality from the Eleventh to the Twelfth Century,” *The Crusades from the Perspective of the Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), 90–91. Of course, Anna Komnene could have used it to refer to several units. One of them were the *Maniakatoi Latinoi*, who were named after the Byzantine insurgent general Georgios Maniakes, who rebelled against the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos in 1042 and whose army consisted mainly of Norman mercenaries coming from southern Italy. Bryennios, 269; Kühn, *Armee*, 258; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 75; Jonathan Shephard, “The Uses of the Franks in Eleventh-Century Byzantium,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993): 283–284, note 170 in Chap. 2. Although the rebellion was suppressed, the unit did not lose its identity and appears in historical sources also later, for example, during the battle of Kalavrye in 1078, where it was deployed on the right wing of Nikeforos Bryennios’ army. Since this part of the army was described as having a total force of about 5000 men (see Bryennios, 269), it can be assumed that the unit itself could have had a total of 2000 men, and this number could still be the same or slightly lower also at the time of Alexios Komnenos’ ascension to the throne.

<sup>233</sup> For example, a unit of 150 Alanian mercenaries, who were still in force during the reign of Michael VII Doukas, joined Alexios Komnenos’ personal services. See note 216 in Chap. 2.

<sup>234</sup> In the spring of 1081, a unit of German mercenaries led by Gilpraktos guarded a section of the Constantinopolitan walls. See *Alexias*, II.10.2. (p. 80).

<sup>235</sup> It should be born in mind that Alexios Komnenos was the Byzantine emperor for only four months at the beginning of August 1081, which means that his political position was very uncertain. Nevertheless, he had to leave Constantinople and face the Norman threat, essentially providing a good opportunity for dissatisfied Byzantine aristocracy to organize a coup against him. That is why it was important that Alexios’ older brother Isaakios, as well as his mother and regent Anna Dalassene, had enough military force available after his departure to be able to suppress any signs of rebellion. Chalandon, *Essai*, 75. Theoretically, the main unit remaining in Constantinople was the *Bigla* (see note 230) and possibly also the *Athanatoi* (in the immediate vicinity). Also, the Varangian guard did not participate in the campaign against the Normans in full, but a part of it continued to fulfill its guard duties in Constantinople and in the complex of the imperial palace. See text below.

<sup>236</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 66. For example, the *Chōmatēnoi* were deployed by Alexios Komnenos in Asia Minor already in the spring of 1081 before the conclusion of the peace treaty with the sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş in Nikaia. *Alexias*, III.11.3–4. (p. 116).

<sup>237</sup> *Alexias*, III.6.3. (p. 100), IV.4.1. (p. 126); Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 270; Chalandon, *Essai*, 75; Dölger, *Regesten*, 25; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 132; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 51; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 120.

emperor set off from Constantinople at the head of the Varangians,<sup>238</sup> the *Exkoubitai*,<sup>239</sup> the *Bestiaritai*,<sup>240</sup> a contingent of Norman mercenaries, the Armenian infantry,<sup>241</sup> and Seljuk allies as a vanguard along the Via *Egnatia* toward Thessalonica, the main rallying point of all the troops which were to fight the Norman invaders.<sup>242</sup> They were joined there by the Makedonian and Thracian *tagma* (*tagmata*),<sup>243</sup> the Thessalian *tagma* (*tagmata*),<sup>244</sup> the

<sup>238</sup>The size of the Varangian guard during this expedition is estimated at 1400 men. Haldon, *Wars*, 134. Another more recent estimate indicates circa 1500–2000 men. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 149. For its composition consisting of the Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons in this period, see note 36 in Chap. 2.

<sup>239</sup>It is estimated that this unit was a thousand men strong. Haldon, *Wars*, 134.

<sup>240</sup>An estimate of circa 1000 men. Haldon, *Wars*, 134.

<sup>241</sup>Chalandon, *Essai*, 77. The size of this unit is estimated at several thousand men. Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150. According to the recent hypothesis made by Leveniotis, this unit composed of the Armenians of Kilikia was sent by *sebastos* Filaretos Brachamios to help Alexios Komnenos. See Geórgios A. Leveniótis, *Η πολιτική κατάρρευση του Βυζαντίου στην Ανατολή. Το ανατολικό σύνορο και η κεντρική Μικρά Ασία κατά το Β΄ μισό του 11<sup>ου</sup> αι. Τόμος Α* (Thessalonica: Ekdóseis Vánias, 2007), 346.

<sup>242</sup>Chalandon, *Essai*, 77.

<sup>243</sup>Since the beginning of the summer of 1081, the troops of this province had been gathering individually in Adrianoupolis, where they were equipped and supplied with all necessary items. Haldon estimates their size at 5000 men. Haldon, *Wars*, 134. Units from Makedonia and Thrace are always mentioned together in the sources, since the two provinces had been merged into one administrative unit by 1074. Kyriazópoulos, *Θράκη*, 199. The commander in charge of the preparations was Nikolaos Branas, deputy of *meegas domestikos* Georgios Pakourianos. See *Alexias*, IV.4.1. (p. 126). For Branas' person and career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 252–253.

<sup>244</sup>*Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126). The numerical strength of these units is unknown. Haldon, *Wars*, 134. It is also not entirely clear what is meant under denomination *tagma* or *tagmata* from Thessaly. Thessaly today is a well-defined area, but in Byzantine era it could also be included into the province of Thessalonica (the administrative unit) or associated with Makedonia (geographical unit). For this, see Kühn, *Armee*, 257. There was a fairly considerable ambiguity in this regard, as there are many cases documented where Thessalonica was referred to as the first (capital) city of Thessaly since the ninth century, although, of course, it geographically belonged to Makedonia. See, for example, Alkmíni Stavrídou-Zafráka, *Θεσσαλονίκη πρώτη πόλις Θεσσαλίας* (Thessalonica: Kéntro istorías Thessaloníkis, 1991); Stávros G. Georgíou, “Ο βέστης και πραιτωρ πάσης Θεσσαλίας Μιχαήλ. Παρατηρήσεις για την διοίκηση της Θεσσαλονίκης στα τέλη του 1<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα,” *Βυζαντιακά* 30 (2012–2013): 196–197. This is also the case with Anna Komnene, where Thessalonica is described as “τὴν Θεσσαλοῦ μεγίστην πόλιν.” *Alexias*, II.8.3. (p. 76). Even William of Apulia refers to Thessalonica as a Thessalian city, see *Gesta*, 236. However, as *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos was among the commanders, to whom Thessalonica was promised as a special “appanage,” it is very likely that the Thessalian *tagma* was actually *tagma* from the province of Thessalonica. See *Alexias*, II.8.3. (p. 76); Zonaras, 732; Mark C. Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 132–133. On the other hand, Anna Komnene mentions Alexander Kabasilas at the head of the cavalrymen from Thessaly (see note 273).

*tagma* of the Paulikians,<sup>245</sup> the Vardariot Turks,<sup>246</sup> as well as the new recruits who seem to have been included in the assembly of the above units as light infantrymen (*peltastai/psiloi*).<sup>247</sup> Other still-existing *tagmata* had not been called to this expedition, for example, the *tagma* from the province of Boulgaria, which in the context of the campaign against the Normans is not mentioned in the sources at all,<sup>248</sup> the *tagma* from the province of Hellas,<sup>249</sup> the *Chōmatēnoi*, or the unit of the Immortals (*Athanatoi*)<sup>250</sup> and probably also the *Bigla*.<sup>251</sup> The total size of the gathered

<sup>245</sup>The numerical strength of this unit was 2800 men. *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127); Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 62. The Paulikians, an Asian Minor dualistic sect with Armenian ethnic background living on the Byzantine-Arab border in the ninth century with the main center around the town of Tephrike, were referred to by the Byzantines as the Manichaeans. Since this sect was hostile to the Byzantines and very often joined Arab troops in their inroads to the Byzantine territory, the Byzantine emperors led a series of military expeditions against it during the ninth and tenth centuries in order to neutralize it. Part of the subjected Paulikians were then transferred from Asia Minor to the Balkans by the emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976) to Philippoupolis (now Plovdiv) to protect the area against the Bulgarians. See also Nina G. Garsoian, “Paulicians,” *ODB*, 1606; Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Prague: Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1974), 32–95; Catherine Asdracha, *La région des Rhodopes aux XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles: Etude de géographie historique* (Athens: Verlag der byzantinisch-neugriechischen Jahrbücher, 1976), 60–61.

<sup>246</sup>*Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126–127). The Byzantine princess talks about the Turks from the vicinity of Ochríd. However, there is a reason to believe that she was erroneous here and meant a unit of Turks (in fact Hungarians) living in the Vardar river valley (*Vardariotai Tourkoi*), that is, the Vardariot Turks, well known from other Byzantine sources. See Chalandon, *Essai*, 76; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150. Birkenmeier for no reason identifies these warriors as the Pechenegs. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 62. Savvídís mistakes them for the Seljuks. Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 53.

<sup>247</sup>See Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150.

<sup>248</sup>The absence of this unit is logical, as it guarded the north and northeast borders toward Hungary. Together with the division from the province of Hellas, it represented Alexios Komnenos’ only strategic reserve in the Balkans. Alexandros Kabasilas is mentioned as its commander in 1078, but he might not have held this post in 1081. See note 273.

<sup>249</sup>Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150. For basic information on this province, see Kühn, *Armee*, 240–241.

<sup>250</sup>The *Athanatoi* probably continued to constitute a reserve formation in the area of the Byzantine capital, or, as in 1080, together with the units of the *Chōmatēnoi*, they were to guard the remnants of territories in Asia Minor against attacks of the Seljuk Turks. *Alexias*, III.11.2–3. (p. 115). Theotokis mistakenly assumes their participation in the campaign. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 149, 156. As mentioned above, the *Athanatoi* were documented around 1092 in Cyprus, from where they were called back to Constantinople and disbanded after taking part in the rebellion against Alexios Komnenos. *Alexias*, IX.2.4. (p. 263); Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 367.

<sup>251</sup>The unit of *Bigla*, as long as its existence can still be presumed, would probably, in accordance with its primary designation, remain in the capital, where its soldiers would perform orderly and guard duties. See note 230.

armed forces, including approximately 2000 Seljuks who accompanied the Byzantine army as allies,<sup>252</sup> is estimated at around 18,000–20,000,<sup>253</sup> but not more than 25,000 men.<sup>254</sup> After arriving in Dyrrachion, the Byzantine forces were to be strengthened by units sent by the Serbian ruler of Diokleia and Rashka, formal Byzantine subjects, Mihailo Vojislavljevich (1050–1081) and his son Constantine Bodin (1081–1099),<sup>255</sup> as well as by the several thousand men-strong garrison of Dyrrachion, commanded by Georgios Palaiologos.<sup>256</sup> Thus, in contrast with the somber impression made by Anna Komnene’s assertions,<sup>257</sup> Alexios Komnenos did have a clear numerical advantage over Guiscard’s host, which numbered only circa 15,000 men.<sup>258</sup>

At first glance, the command structure of the relatively diverse Byzantine army might seem unclear because, in addition to the military “professionals” commanding individual units, a significant number of members of the Byzantine elite from leading aristocratic families took part in the campaign, often in close kinship with the emperor and with no obvious military rank or position.<sup>259</sup> The commander-in-chief of the expedition was understandably Alexios Komnenos. His second-in-command and de facto commander of the assembled forces was the

<sup>252</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 134.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Birkenmeier, *Army*, 62. There is also a much more conservative estimate that Alexios Komnenos’ army was not more than 10,000 strong. See Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 120. However, this number is too low and therefore unlikely.

<sup>255</sup> Fine, *Balkans*, 221; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 53. We do not know the size of the Serbian army, but it could have included from several hundred to several thousand men. Mihailo ruled until approximately April 1081; after that date, there are no mentions of him in the period sources. Predrag Komatina, “Византијска титула Константина Бодина,” *ZRVI* 48 (2011): 71.

<sup>256</sup> See note 170.

<sup>257</sup> Anna Komnene states that the size of Guiscard’s host was 30,000 men (see note 133), making no mention of the size of the Byzantine army, giving the clever impression that her father was actually defending the empire against a stronger invader.

<sup>258</sup> By contrast, Alexios Komnenos’ numerical superiority is correctly recorded by Malaterra, and “countless” Byzantine army is also mentioned by William of Apulia. Malaterra, 582–583; *Gesta*, 223. Similarly, although with some hyperbole, the apparent Byzantine predominance is described in the works of Romuald of Salerno (60,000 Byzantines and 10,000 Turks), Lupus Protospatharius (70,000 Byzantines), Peter Diaconus (170,000 Byzantines), and Orderic Vitalis. Romualdus Salernitanus, *Chronicon Romualdi II. archiepiscopi Salernitani*, RISS VII, ed. L. A. Muratori (Milano, 1725), 174; Lupus Protospatharius, 45; Diaconus, 785–786; Orderic Vitalis, 18.

<sup>259</sup> Although most of these individuals apparently received high-quality military education, see Marek Meško, “Byzantská armáda a loďstvo v 11. storočí pred nástupom dynastie Komnénovcov (1081),” *Vojenská história* 19, vol. 4 (2015): 15–16.

experienced and noble general of Georgian origin, *sebastos* Gregorios Pakourianos (Gregor Bakurianisdze), appointed by Alexios Komnenos after his successful coup as the new *domestikos* of the West (*megas domestikos tēs Dysēōs*).<sup>260</sup> However, on the social level, this military professional was greatly overshadowed, for example, by Alexios Komnenos' brother-in-law, *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos,<sup>261</sup> by emperor's protégés<sup>262</sup> and sons of the former emperor Romanos IV Diogenes, *porfyrogenētoi*

<sup>260</sup> *Alexias*, II.4.7 (p. 64), *Alexias*, IV.6.2 (p. 132); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 120; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 112–115. For further details regarding the Georgian origin of Gregorios Pakourianos and his family, see Ernest Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071 nach griechischen, arabischen, syrischen und armenischen Quellen* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales, 1935), 222–226; Paul Lemerle, "Le typikon de Grégoire Pakourianos (décembre 1083)," *Cinq études sur le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle byzantin*, 158–161. With Gregorios Pakourianos possibly went on the campaign also other far less-known members of his extended family, either as members of the imperial entourage or as his own armed retinue. Such possibility is indicated by a tentative identification of otherwise unknown general Zacharias (mentioned by Anna Komnene only once in connection with the battle of Dyrrhachion) as *nobelissimos* and *doux* Zacharias Pakourianos. *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 135); Werner Seibt, "The Byzantine Seals of the Pakourianos Clan," in *Representing History: Theoretical Trends and Case Studies*. International Conference dedicated to 90th Anniversary of Academician Mariam Lordkipanidze's Birth. Proceedings, edited by Ivane Javakishvili, (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University, 2014), 131. See also note 275.

<sup>261</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.2. (p. 132); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 240–245. Nikeforos Melissenos married Alexios' older sister Eudokia. Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 80. The eminent aristocratic family of the Melissenoi came from Asia Minor, and Nikeforos himself had properties around Dorylaion (now Eski Şehir, Turkey). Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 217. His lead seals are also abundantly represented in the sigillographic material. See, for example, Georges Zacos and Alexander Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, vol. 1, part 3, no. 2672–3231 (Basel: Basel Zacos, 1972), 1480–1485, or the latest Vera Bulgurlu, "Halûk Perk Müze Koleksiyonu'nda Bulunan Dört Bizans İmparator Kurhun Mühürü," *Tulîya* I (2005): 251–260.

<sup>262</sup> Anna Komnene makes several points about how her father, after taking the throne, kindly took care of both sons of Romanos IV Diogenes. For example, see *Alexias*, IX.6.1. (p. 270 ff). Besides obvious political reasons (securing the affection of two other possible nominees for the throne), the fact that Alexios' older sister Theodora Komnene married Constantine Diogenes, the elder half-brother of both princes, who died in 1075 in the battle against the Seljuks near Antioch, may have played a role in his decision-making. Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 85–86.

(purple-born) Leo<sup>263</sup> and Nikeforos,<sup>264</sup> by the son of Constantine X Doukas and the younger brother of Michael VII Doukas, *porfyrogennētos* Constantine (Constantios),<sup>265</sup> as well as by the nephew of the recently deposed emperor Nikeforos Synadenos.<sup>266</sup> A similar concentration of members of the top ruling class participating in one and the same campaign is certainly exceptional and undoubtedly points to the importance of the expedition against the Norman threat.<sup>267</sup> The Varangian guard was commanded by *akolouthos* Nampites (Nábítr),<sup>268</sup> the *Exkoubitai* unit by *magistros* Constantine Opos,<sup>269</sup> the *Bestiaritai* by Niketas Panoukomites,<sup>270</sup> the division from Makedonia and Thrace by certain

<sup>263</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 130); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 175–176.

<sup>264</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 130); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 233–237. However, Nikeforos' participation in this campaign is now questioned, as based on all known data about him, he could have been only around ten years old in 1081, which is naturally too young age to actively participate in combat. See Frankopan, “Unravelling the *Alexiad*: Who was ‘Devgenevich’ of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and ‘Pseudo-Diogenes’ of the Greek sources?” *BMGs* 29, vol. 2 (2005): 161.

<sup>265</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 130); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 55–57.

<sup>266</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 130); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 248.

<sup>267</sup> Since Alexios Komnenos had to move against the Normans virtually within just a few months after his successful coup, there is one less obvious but very important motive in terms of the preservation of imperial power. All of these individuals could, without exception, raise credible claims to the imperial throne, and some of them as *porfyrogennētoi* (such as Leo and Nikeforos Diogenes, or Constantine Doukas) even possessed an undisputable hereditary right which was even more legitimate than that of Alexios Komnenos' himself, who was “only” emperor's nephew. Moreover, Nikeforos Melissenos only recently relinquished the imperial title in favor of Alexios Komnenos and was his recent rival. Therefore, the emperor could legitimately fear that Melissenos' recognition of his inferior status was only temporary. Thus, in his absence due to the expedition against the Normans, the young emperor could not afford to leave any of these men behind in Constantinople, as he would then be at risk of a new coup. For this see Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 362; Frankopan, “Melissenos,” 165.

<sup>268</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 130); Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 51; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 149. For more on Nampites, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 216–217; Blöndal, *Varangians*, 123.

<sup>269</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 71–73; Kühn, *Armee*, 98–99; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 62; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 53; Aléxios G. C. Savvidis, “Περὶ τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ οἴκου τῶν Ὁπῶν στὸν 11<sup>ο</sup> αἰῶνα,” *Vyzantina* 17 (1994): 326–328. See also a series of prosopographical studies, Stávros G. Georgíou, “Προσωπογραφικά τῆς Κομνήνειας περιόδου Α: ὁ πρωτονωβελίσσιμος καὶ μέγας δούκας Κωνσταντίνος Ὁπός,” *Vyzantina* 24 (2004): 219–232; Stávros G. Georgíou, “A Contribution to the Study of Byzantine Prosopography: the Byzantine Family of Opoi,” *Byzantion* 78 (2008): 232; Stávros G. Georgíou, “The Byzantine Family of Opoi: Addenda et Corrigena,” *Byzantion* 83 (2013): 109. For his published seals, see Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 444.

<sup>270</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 250; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150.

Antiochos,<sup>271</sup> Norman mercenaries in Byzantine services by *prōtoproedros* Constantine Houmbertopoulos,<sup>272</sup> the division from Thessaly by *kouropalatēs* Alexandros Kabasilas,<sup>273</sup> the Paulikians by Xantas and Kouleon,<sup>274</sup> the Armenian infantry by Aspietes (traditionally identified as

<sup>271</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126). Anna Komnene does not mention Antiochos' first name. According to the preserved sigillographic material, it probably was Constantine or Michael. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 25–27.

<sup>272</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127); Chalandon, *Essai*, 77; Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150. Constantine Houmbertopoulos came from southern Italy and was apparently of Norman origin. He is even believed to be Robert Guiscard's own nephew. See McQueen, "Relations," 437; J.-C. Cheynet, "Du prénom au patronyme: les étrangers à Byzance (Xe–XIIe siècles)," *SBS* 1 (1987): 60. Houmbertopoulos' military career began during the reign of Nikeforos III Botaneiates. It is likely that after the death of Roussel of Bailleul, he was entrusted with the command of the Norman mercenary unit. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 356. During the Komnenoi coup in the spring of 1081, he was one of Alexios Komnenos' most devoted supporters. For details on his entire career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 68–71; Cheynet, "Rôle," 122–123, and for his promotion in the hierarchy of the Byzantine imperial court reconstructed on the basis of found lead seals, see Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 312–314; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 491; Jordanka Jurukova, "Sceaux de Constantin Humberto," *Actes du XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des études byzantines, Bucarest 6–12 septembre 1971*, vol. 3 (Bucarest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1976), 235–242.

<sup>273</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 11–12. Alexandros Kabasilas was one of the leading supporters of the former emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates, who appointed him as the commander of the province of Boulgaria after taking the throne in 1078 (*doux Skopiōn*). Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 185; Kühn, *Armee*, 231. For this reason, his presence could indicate the participation of units from the province of Boulgaria in the campaign against Guiscard. However, this possibility should be dismissed for a number of reasons; first, in 1081, Alexandros Kabasilas might no longer have held the same position as in 1078, and second, Anna Komnene explicitly states that he commanded a unit of cavalrymen from Thessaly. *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126). For his published lead seals, see Werner Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegeln in Österreich*, part 1, Kaiserhof (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), 257–258. Birkenmeier erroneously states that Kabasilas commanded cavalry units from Makedonia and Thrace, the commander of which was in fact Antiochos. See Birkenmeier, *Army*, 62.

<sup>274</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 167–169 (Kouleon), 300–301 (Xantas); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150.



Armenian Prince Ōšin, the son of Hethum of Kilikia),<sup>275</sup> the Vardariot Turks by *meġas primikērios* Tatikios,<sup>276</sup> and, finally, the Seljuk allies or the local troops from Epirus (or province of Nikopolis) by Basileios Mesopotamites.<sup>277</sup> The list of high-ranking commanders also includes

<sup>275</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 135); Chalandon, *Essai*, 77; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 150. For further information on his background and career, see Leveniōtis, *Katárrevesh A'*, 400–401. For the identification of Ōšin with Aspietes in the text of Anna Komnene, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 29–30. More recently, however, another identification challenging this opinion was proposed by Werner Seibt. He has little doubt that Aspietes is identical with *kouropalatēs* Aspietes Pakourianos, the member of the extended Pakourianos (Bakourianisdze) family and relative to *meġas domestikos* of the West Gregorios Pakourianos (see note 260). This individual is well known from the sigillographic record, and his reconstructed *cursus honorum* matches the known facts about his career from the written sources. Seibt, “Pakourianos Clan,” 132–133. See also Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou-Seibt, “Kaukasische Aristokraten auf byzantinischer Karrierleiter. Eine kritische Nachlese des Quellenbefunds zur Familie Aspietai (1081–1205),” *BZ* 108–1 (2015): 209.

<sup>276</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126); Chalandon, *Essai*, 76; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 52. Tatikios was the son of a captive of Turkish descent who was brought to Byzantium by Alexios Komnenos' father, *kouropalatēs* John. Being of about the same age, Tatikios was made Alexios' “companion,” and the two grow up together. In connection with military operations, he is first mentioned by Nikeforos Bryennios in the description of Basilakios' rebellion in 1078. Tatikios took part in Alexios Komnenos' campaign against this insurgent as a scout and spy. Bryennios, 289. After Alexios Komnenos' ascension to the imperial throne in 1081, Tatikios was awarded the military rank of *meġas primikērios* (possibly in full *meġas primikērios tōn esō bestiaritōn*, see note 97 in Chap. 6). See also Brand, “Element,” 3–4; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 287–292; Guyla Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, II. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958), 302; Alēxios G. K. Savvidis, “Varia Byzantinoturcica II: Taticius the Turcople,” *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 3–4 (1991–1992): 235–238.

<sup>277</sup> *Gesta*, 222; Haldon, *Wars*, 134. Savvidis and Theotokis use a distorted form of his name—Basileios Mesardonites. Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 52; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 154. Interestingly, Anna Komnene makes no mention of this Byzantine commander, and we only have information about his participation in combat actions from William of Apulia. Further, it is not entirely clear what troops were under his command. From the description of a skirmish which took place between his unit and the Normans at the port of Butrint, we first learn that he was at the head of “two thousand elite riders” and that he commanded the “Turks.” *Gesta*, 222: “electorum equitum (...) duo milia,” “Turchorum, quos duxerat ille.” Ducellier presents a tempting hypothesis that Basileios Mesopotamites could have come from a location called Mesopotami, situated on the north side of the valley which opens to the Adriatic coast directly opposite Korfu (about four kilometers from today's Delvinë, Albania). Ducellier, *Albanie*, 43. Butrint also lies on the southern edge of this bay, which, if this commander really came from Mesopotami, points to Alexios Komnenos' logical attempt to use Basileios' detailed knowledge of local countryside in the fight against the Normans. See text below.

Georgios Palaiologos' father Nikeforos.<sup>278</sup> Most of these military cadres, as Anna Komnene claims, were the bravest among the Byzantine nobility,<sup>279</sup> which again points out that Alexios Komnenos left nothing to chance even in terms of personnel.

The naval jaw of the mighty pliers with which Alexios Komnenos intended to pin down and crush the Norman host besieging Dyrrachion was made up of the allied Venetian fleet. The Venetians, headed by the doge Domenico Silvio himself, appeared in sight of Dyrrachion, or Cape Palli located north of it,<sup>280</sup> sometime in mid-August 1081.<sup>281</sup> This only confirmed their reputation of outstanding sailors, as between the beginning of June and mid-August 1081 they managed to assemble, equip, and send a fleet of fifty-nine warships to the destination pre-arranged with the Byzantines.<sup>282</sup> Since the Norman-Dalmatian fleet had only fifty oared

<sup>278</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 134–135); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 245–247.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.4.2. (p. 126).

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.2.3. (p. 123); *Historia Sicula*, 769; Chalandon, *Essai*, 74; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 269; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 50. The meeting point was certainly not random, as Cape Palli was in the eleventh century part of the wider system of Dyrrachion fortification with a permanent garrison stationed there. Ducellier, *Albanie*, 26, 34. Given the ongoing siege of the city by the Normans, this was the only possible place where the Venetians could meet the defenders face to face and learn from them information about the location and numerical forces of the Norman invaders, especially their fleet.

<sup>281</sup> For this dating, see Kislinger, “Notizen,” 132. See also Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 54. Another premise, firstly uttered by Manfroni, then followed by Chalandon and later by Bünemann and Stanton, according to which the Venetian fleet appeared in sight of Dyrrachion as early as July 1081, is too optimistic. See Camillo Manfroni, *Storia della marina italiana. Dalle invasioni barbariche al trattato di Ninfco (anni di C. 400–1261)* (Livorno: Academia navale, 1899), 125; Chalandon, *Essai*, 74; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 117; Stanton, *Operations*, 52. The Venetian timeliness with an agreement with Alexios Komnenos is illustrated by an interesting detail preserved in Malaterra's description, saying that the Venetian fleet appeared at the designated place three days earlier than it was agreed (unfortunately, Malaterra does not specify the exact date). Malaterra, 583. According to Anna Komnene, the Venetians disembarked a small group of mercenaries on Cape Palli, possibly as reinforcement for Dyrrachion defenders. *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123); Böhm, *Flota*, 119.

<sup>282</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.2. (p. 122–123); *Gesta*, 218; Böhm, *Flota*, 118. According to Nicol, the Venetian fleet consisted of fourteen large galleys and forty-five other vessels adapted for military use. Nicol, *Venice*, 57. According to Manfroni, the Venetians had fourteen light galleys, nine horse transporting vessels, and thirty-six other vessels. Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 125. Whereas at the first glance, this description does not differ much, it still contains a crucial dissimilarity—fourteen light galleys instead of large ones. In the light of written sources and description of the naval battle between the Venetians and the Normans, I chose to side with more recent Nicol's view.

warships, the Venetians outnumbered their opponents before the battle.<sup>283</sup> The unsuspecting Norman ships were anchored peacefully off Dyrrachion when their sailors spotted the approaching Venetian fleet. Robert Guiscard sent ships to meet the Venetians, with Bohemund as the chief negotiator and commander.<sup>284</sup> Bohemund first inquired about the purpose of the Venetians for coming to Dyrrachion and on whose side of the conflict they intended to stand. After that, the Normans told them to acclaim Michael VII Doukas as the legitimate emperor (by which they would actually reject the alliance with Alexios Komnenos).<sup>285</sup> The doge tactically postponed the definitive answer until the next morning.<sup>286</sup> The Norman squadron returned to Dyrrachion, and the Venetians dropped anchors and began necessary steps for passing the night in the open sea.<sup>287</sup> Yet, in the meantime, other preparations were carried out in the dark of night. The Venetians were getting ready for the upcoming battle, as they had no intention of acceding to the Norman demands.<sup>288</sup>

On the following day, Norman fleet consisting of fifty galleys set sail from the harbor, and Bohemund again called on Domenico Silvio to side

<sup>283</sup> Böhm, *Flota*, 118. This fact also demonstrates how well Alexios Komnenos was informed of the size of the Norman army and navy, as to ensure numerical superiority over the enemy before the upcoming battle (as far as possible) is one of the fundamental concerns of any military commander.

<sup>284</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123).

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 118.

<sup>286</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123); Chalandon, *Essai*, 74; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 443; Böhm, *Flota*, 119. At this point, it should be pointed out that the description of the first naval encounter between the Venetians and the Normans is rather contradictory in the sources. According to Anna Komnene, no fighting occurred on the first day. In contrast, Malaterra says that the battle began on the very first day and adds that the Norman force was so overwhelming that the exhausted Venetians asked for a ceasefire in the evening, claiming that they would surrender to Guiscard the next day. Instead, during the night (in line with Anna Komnene's description) they prepared for another round of fighting. Malaterra, 583. The description of the battle by William of Apulia begins on the eve of the naval battle, during which the Venetians quickly gained dominance and then headed toward the Norman ships anchored in the port. *Gesta*, 220. See also text below. See Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 152–153.

<sup>287</sup> Anna Komnene says that the Venetians were unable to anchor nearer to the shore due to the windless conditions, so they decided to stay at the open sea over the night. *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123). However, this reason is not credible, as the Byzantine princess immediately contradicts herself by claiming that the Venetians disembarked a small group of mercenaries at Cape Palli. *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123). Therefore, the Venetians probably chose to stay in high sea because of the danger of a sudden hostile ambush, which they would surely be in danger of if they dropped anchor at the coast in sight of the Norman camp (or Dyrrachion).

<sup>288</sup> Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 269.

with the Norman duke and the emperor Michael VII Doukas. The Venetian doge, who used those several hours of postponement to prepare for the fight, briskly rejected the Norman request this time. Rank-and-file Venetian sailors even made fun of Bohemund's juvenile appearance (unlike the Venetians or the Byzantines, he was smoothly shaved).<sup>289</sup> Since most of the Venetian fleet consisted of less mobile and larger transport ships adapted for military purposes, the doge resigned to maneuvering. Instead, he had his vessels lashed firmly together with ropes, creating a floating wooden structure on the waves, which Anna Komnene calls a "sea harbor" (*pelagolimēn*).<sup>290</sup> Large transport vessels, thanks to the height of their hull, essentially worked as a kind of strongholds where ammunition and various other "surprises" were stored to fend off the Norman attack.<sup>291</sup> In addition, on board of these large ships, the Venetians erected makeshift wooden towers, from which they were ready to thrust heavy logs "enhanced" by sharp nails.<sup>292</sup> The Normans under Bohemund's command tried to attack this real sea fortress, but the Venetians fighting from the higher-lying

<sup>289</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.4. (p. 123); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 118.

<sup>290</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123); Alexandrís, Δύναμις, 317–318; Bennett, "Naval Activity," 54; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 51; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 444; Böhm, *Flota*, 119; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 118. Bennett believes that *pelagolimēn* was a night formation of the Venetian fleet for anchoring in the open sea and was untied before the battle so they could maneuver their ships more easily. According to him, Anna Komnene erred due to her lack of knowledge of naval combat tactics. See Bennett, "Naval Activity," 57. Also the true shape of *pelagolimēn* presents a certain mystery. Based on his reading of *Naumachica* by the emperor Leo VI Manfroni believes that the Venetian ships were arranged in a semicircle with their bows facing outward (to the south, toward the enemy), protecting the smaller vessels within the concavity. Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 126; Stanton, *Operations*, 52. This formation (known generally as crescent formation) would not protect all the ships efficiently during total encirclement by the enemy ships, however. Therefore I think that the Venetian vessels arranged themselves in a full circle (with their bows outward) so that their *pelagolimēn* would become impregnable to any kind of flanking maneuvers.

<sup>291</sup> Malaterra states that some of the Venetian ships were equipped by the liquid or Greek fire. Malaterra, 584; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 118. The veracity of this information can be doubted, see note 294.

<sup>292</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.3. (p. 123); Alexandrís, Δύναμις, 318; Bennett, "Naval Activity," 54; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 153; Böhm, *Flota*, 119.

decks caused massive losses to the attackers.<sup>293</sup> With the help of the aforementioned wooden logs, the Venetians even sank several enemy vessels, including Bohemund's flagship.<sup>294</sup> Seeing this, the Normans retreated to the harbor and preferred to beach many of their vessels because of the general panic among their crews, effectively acknowledging their defeat in the first phase of the battle. Encouraged by the Venetian success, the doge ordered to dissolve the tight defensive formation. The individual Venetian ships now advanced on their own to the harbor and begun attacking virtually defenseless Norman vessels.<sup>295</sup> The Normans now defended themselves only by dense volleys of arrows from the coast and from the decks of ships. At this stage of the battle, the Venetians also captured several, mostly Dalmatian, vessels. Amidst whistling of many arrows, they managed to cut anchor ropes and, with the help of hooks, pulled them out to sea and captured them.<sup>296</sup> The chaos on land near the Norman camp was topped with a sudden sally of the Dyrrachion defenders, organized by Georgios Palaiologos to help the Venetians.<sup>297</sup> However, due to the small number of attackers, Guiscard soon managed to cope with the critical situation on

<sup>293</sup> Stanton, "Power," 135. The main weapons in this battle, as in other naval conflicts during this period, were arrows and spears. See Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 153. Opposing fleets showered each other with volleys of arrows, javelins, and spears, which were supposed to weaken the adversary as much as possible, followed usually by an abordage, that is, the capture of enemy vessels by means of boarding and hand-to-hand combat. See Edmund Kosiarz, *Námorné bitky* (Bratislava: Pravda, 1988), 44–45. For abordage, see Radomír Pleiner, *Minilexikon k dějinám loďní a námorní plavby* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1994), 9.

<sup>294</sup> Bohemund had to be rescued from the sinking ship by jumping aboard another Norman vessel. *Alexias*, IV.2.4. (p. 124); Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 444; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 118; Böhm, *Flota*, 119; Stanton, *Operations*, 52. The Normans are said to have sunk one large Venetian ship in return. According to Malaterra, at this stage of the fight, the Venetians were also supposed to deploy the aforementioned Greek fire, which they poured into the sea using pipes and set it on fire. Malaterra, 584. However, it is precisely the way in which this weapon was deployed which shows that it was not a genuine Greek fire, that is, an incendiary mixture which, with the help of a pump and a hose (*sifon*), was discharged so that the mixture, inflamed at the mouth of the siphon, flew in a long arc through the air and hit an enemy vessel, igniting it. The Venetians did not shoot the substance, but poured it into the sea and then set it on fire. For a summary of the descriptions contained in various historical sources, see Korrés, *Υπόμνημα*, 136–169.

<sup>295</sup> *Gesta*, 220; Böhm, *Flota*, 119.

<sup>296</sup> *Gesta*, 220.

<sup>297</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.5. (p. 123–124); Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 127; Chalandon, *Essai*, 74; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 444; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 51; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 118; Böhm, *Flota*, 119; Stanton, *Operations*, 53.

land. In spite of this, the Venetians gained great spoils and returned to their anchorage in a winning mood.<sup>298</sup>

Thanks to their superior naval skills, the Venetians clearly prevailed in the first encounter with the Norman-Dalmatian fleet, de facto cutting off the Norman naval connections to Apulian ports (the remaining Norman ships did not dare to leave the port).<sup>299</sup> In addition to the strategic importance, this victory also represented a significant moral boost for the Byzantines, as news of it spread to all sides. Encouraged by this joyous news, many places in the Byzantine Epirus stopped paying the tribute to the Normans and once again pledged allegiance to Alexios Komnenos, who, at the head of the Byzantine army, set off from Thessalonica and marched straight to Dyrrachion along the Via *Egnatia*.<sup>300</sup> Only the acropolis of Korfu and several ports on the coast of Epirus remained in the Norman hands.<sup>301</sup> Thanks to the above-described nature of the Epirotic hinterland, Guiscard and his entire host found themselves practically surrounded, and it seemed only a matter of time before the growing lack of supplies and the continuing disruptive attacks by Byzantine forces on land and the Venetian blockade at sea force them to capitulate. However, despite these setbacks, the Norman duke refused to give up and stubbornly continued in the siege of Dyrrachion, whose walls, if conquered, would provide the Norman host with a safer refuge against the Byzantines than their camp.<sup>302</sup>

In September 1081,<sup>303</sup> the main imperial forces slowly set off from Thessalonica along the Via *Egnatia* toward Edessa (Vodena) and Ostrobos<sup>304</sup> up to Lake Ochrid. From there they continued toward today's city of Elbasan and along the upper course of the Deabolis river to its

<sup>298</sup> *Alexias*, IV.2.6. (p. 124).

<sup>299</sup> *Gesta*, 220; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 270; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 119; Böhm, *Flota*, 119; Haldon, *Wars*, 133.

<sup>300</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 124–125); *Gesta*, 220; Chalandon, *Essai*, 75; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 270; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 119.

<sup>301</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 153; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 49.

<sup>302</sup> Birkenmeier, *Army*, 63.

<sup>303</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 154.

<sup>304</sup> The Ostrobos fortress was probably located about one kilometer west of today's site of Arnissa (which was named Ostrovo until 1926). The defensive capabilities of the fortress were boosted by the lake at the foot of the hill. See Vassiliki Kravari, *Villes et village de Macédoine occidentale* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1989), 309–310.

estuary at the coastal plain.<sup>305</sup> The Byzantine army seems to have stopped at this point in early October 1081, and Alexios Komnenos dispatched spies toward Dyrrachion and other coastal locations to learn about the current location and activities of the Normans as much as possible and, based on the information received, decide on how to proceed further. It is clear that despite the urgent situation, the Byzantine emperor was in no hurry, and as soon as his forces found themselves in Epirus, he proceeded with the utmost caution. Alexios Komnenos apparently also attempted a deceptive maneuver to lure Guiscard's main forces away from the besieged city before going straight to Dyrrachion. This consisted in a mock attack on the Norman forces occupying Butrint in the south, where Alexios Komnenos sent a detachment of Seljuk allies under the command of Basileios Mesopotamites. However, the Normans easily fend off the attacking Turks, capturing Mesopotamites<sup>306</sup> and immediately presenting him to the Norman duke encamped near Dyrrachion, where he was questioned about the intentions of the Byzantines.<sup>307</sup>

Alexios Komnenos did not let himself be discouraged by the initial setback. Even at this point, he probably still hoped that the Normans, whose morale was badly shaken after the naval victory of the Venetians, preferred to give up further siege after the arrival of other Byzantine troops and that the conflict would be settled through diplomatic channels. Therefore, he led his army along the last section of the Via *Egnatia* toward the fortress of Petrela (south of today's Tirana)<sup>308</sup> located on the middle course of the Charzanes river. Byzantine troops continued in their march to the end of a narrow river valley, called *Kakē pleura* by Anna Komnene, opening to

<sup>305</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 120. The Deabolis is today's river Devoll in Albania. William of Apulia refers to it as *Divalis* and Malaterra even as *fluvius Daemoniorum*, see *Gesta*, 229; Malaterra, 584.

<sup>306</sup> *Gesta*, 222; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 120.

<sup>307</sup> The Norman duke sought information from the captured Basileios Mesopotamites about Alexios Komnenos' plans as well as the size of his troops. *Gesta*, 222.

<sup>308</sup> This place named *Πετρούλα* is mentioned also by Anna Komnene, but only in connection with the second Norman attack led by Guiscard's son Bohemund in 1108. *Alexias*, XIII.12.3. (p. 388). A small Byzantine fortress (*kastron*) was probably located there even before this date (between 1081 and 1085), because modern findings confirm its existence prior to the eleventh century. See Ducellier, *Albanie*, 16–17; Ducellier, "Observations sur quelques monuments de l'Albanie," *L'Albanie entre Byzance et Venise, Xe-XVe siècles* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), 163–165; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 164.

the coastal plain<sup>309</sup> where Alexios Komnenos ordered them to stop and set up a camp.<sup>310</sup> The reasons for building the camp here were multiple. The besieged city of Dyrrachion was already within the reach (approx. 9 km as the crow flies). Before advancing further, Alexios Komnenos needed to find out exactly where Guiscard's forces were located in order to plan the final phase of his approach to the enemy.<sup>311</sup> At the same time, he sent a messenger with an escort to the Norman camp to find out from the Norman duke himself "*why he came and what his intentions are.*"<sup>312</sup> Before

<sup>309</sup>Today, the valley is called Ndroqi and is located probably somewhere on the left bank of the Erzen (Charzanes) river between today's villages of Hardhistë and Pjezë. For the identification of the Ndroqi valley with the site of *Kakë pleura*, see Ducellier, *Albanie*, 16.

<sup>310</sup>The whole march from Constantinople to the vicinity of Dyrrachion (circa 1131 km or 1131–6 = 1125 km, see Ioánnis Dimitroúkas, "Ενδείξεις για την διάρκεια των χειρσαίων ταξιδιών και μετακινήσεων στο Βυζάντιο (6<sup>ος</sup>–11<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας)," *Symmeikta* 12 (1998), 25), including a stopover in Thessalonica, took the Byzantine army just over two and a half months (from early August to mid-October 1081). Nevertheless, it is impossible to calculate the exact rate of march, as the length of stops (especially in Thessalonica) is unknown. If the Byzantine army interrupted its advance for at least a week, the whole march could have lasted circa seventy days, which would mean that the Byzantine army traveled about sixteen kilometers a day. This figure corresponds well to the so-called *iter iustum* (ten Roman miles, which is circa fifteen kilometers), a distance marched by the Roman army per day under normal circumstances. There was also the so-called *iter magnum*, accelerated daily movement, during which soldiers traveled a distance of 15 Roman miles per day (22.2 km), marching at an increased pace for two days in a row and on the third day rested. See Dimitroúkas, "Ενδείξεις," 16. Since the Byzantine army still followed similar customs inherited from the Romans, it is possible to conclude that the rate of march of the Byzantine army from Constantinople to Epirus was normal, not accelerated, and despite the distress messages from Dyrrachion, Alexios Komnenos tried to spare his soldiers as much as possible for the upcoming fight, which was again in line with the advice contained in the Byzantine military manuals; for example, Kekaumenos in his *Strategikon* strongly recommended that the commander should enter the battle with rested soldiers; otherwise, he risked defeat. See Kekaumenos, 91–93.

<sup>311</sup>It is not clear from the preserved written sources which party was first aware of the presence of the other. Guiscard learned about the arrival of the Byzantine army through his soldiers who were coming out of the camp every day to get food supplies from the surrounding area. Malaterra also states the distance of the Byzantine camp from the Norman camp, indicating that Guiscard had sufficient information of the movements of the Byzantines from the beginning. Malaterra, 584. Alexios Komnenos also apparently sent his own scouts and spies toward Dyrrachion, as he was later able to dispatch his messenger directly to the Norman camp (see note 312). Moreover, according to the Byzantine military manuals, it was expected of a Byzantine commander to deploy spies in a similar situation, and it would be illogical if the military-educated Byzantine emperor ignored this measure, thus depriving himself of the opportunity to learn as much as possible about the enemy army. See Kekaumenos, 54.

<sup>312</sup>*Alexias*, IV.5.1. (p. 129); Dölger, *Regesten*, 25, no. 1074; Bünnemann, *Guiscard*, 121.



his return, Alexios Komnenos decided to get even closer to Dyrrachion and set up a camp for the entire army on the seashore near St. Nicholas' church, less than six kilometers from the besieged city.<sup>313</sup> It was 15 October 1081.<sup>314</sup> The site in question not only allowed Alexios Komnenos direct visual observation of the Norman camp and the Norman-besieged Dyrrachion, but also enabled him to establish communication links with both the Venetians and the defenders of Dyrrachion thanks to the Venetian dominance at sea.<sup>315</sup> Since St. Nicholas' church was situated near the main road heading from Dyrrachion to the south, Byzantine forces camping on this site also effectively blocked the only route through which Guiscard could receive reinforcements from his troops occupying the Epirotic coast further south.

In fact, the Byzantines, together with the Venetian fleet, tightened the imaginary noose around the invading host camping near Dyrrachion. Alexios Komnenos apparently expected Guiscard to acknowledge the clear

<sup>313</sup>The place where St. Nicholas' church was located was identified by Ducellier on the basis of a copper engraving of the port of 1571 by a Venetian printer Giovanni Francesco Camocio, where it is described as S. Nicolo church. The church stood near the coast south of today's port of Dürres. This area called Sasso Bianco (in the ancient times Petra) is typical of its hills reaching from the hinterland (Shkëmbi i Kavajës) about 100 meters above the sea level and receding here close to the coastline, creating a narrow defile, which generally matches the description in the *Alexiad. Alexias*, IV.5.2. (p. 129); Ducellier, *Albanie*, 35; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 122. However, Anna Komnene's and Gaufrédo Malaterra's identical distance of 4 *stadia*, corresponding to 800 meters (provided that 1 ancient *στάδιον* = 200 m), is rather suspicious (Malaterra, 584). This is too short a distance; it would be absurd for the Byzantine army to camp so near to the Normans. A likely explanation for this apparent contradiction was given by Schilbach, who suggests that Anna Komnene, fond of archaic terms, probably used ancient *στάδιον* to denote a Roman mile (1 mile = 1480 m). This unit of length was used for measuring distances even in the Byzantine period. Erich Schilbach, *Byzantinische Metrologie: Byzantinisches Handbuch im Rahmen des Handbuchs der Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 12, part 4 (München: Beck, 1960), 32–33. In this case, the distance of 4 *stadia* would increase to 5920 meters, that is, less than 6 km, which corresponds to the above-mentioned location. At this site, a smaller watercourse used to flow into the sea, which also confirms the possibility that the Byzantine army set up a camp there. Camping soldiers and horses consumed large quantities of water per day, so, in accordance with the recommendations of the Byzantine military manuals, it was necessary to camp near an abundant source of drinking water (spring, stream, river, etc.). See, for example, Kekaumenos, 61.

<sup>314</sup>*Alexias*, IV.5.2. (p. 129); Chalandon, *Essai*, 79; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 270; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 166; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 122; Kislinger, "Notizen," 133.

<sup>315</sup>The existence of a sea connection is confirmed by Alexios' repeated communication with Georgios Palaiologos in besieged Dyrrachion and his subsequent arrival at the imperial tent before the battle. *Alexias*, IV.5.2. (p. 129); Kislinger, "Notizen," 133.

disadvantage of his position. He hoped that this would lead to the end of hostilities and gradual withdrawal of the Norman host back to southern Italy. Yet, surprisingly, the Byzantine envoy returned to the Byzantine camp with a new set of Guiscard's demands, which were for the young emperor impossible to accept.<sup>316</sup> From this moment on, it was clear that the dispute can be resolved only by fighting. The Norman duke was fully aware of this fact and, after the Byzantine emissary left, convened a council with all his principal commanders.<sup>317</sup> There, he briefly summed up the rather unfavorable situation the Normans found themselves in, arguing that the only solution was to achieve victory over the much stronger Byzantine army in a classic field battle as soon as possible.<sup>318</sup> However, despite his warlike speech, Guiscard did not intend to leave the camp to attack first, as some of his commanders proposed. On the contrary, his plan was to wait until the Byzantine army gets to the immediate vicinity of the camp and only then engage in a decisive clash.<sup>319</sup> Meanwhile, news of the arrival of a large imperial army spread among the ordinary Norman soldiers, raising fears in some of them of the imminent battle.<sup>320</sup>

Similarly, also Alexios Komnenos convened a war council with all his commanders, which is believed to have taken place on 16 October 1081.<sup>321</sup> But, unlike the Norman duke, who from the beginning saw the only possible solution in quick direct confrontation, the Byzantine emperor apparently hesitated between a frontal attack and an indirect attempt to blockade and starve the enemies out, as Anna Komnene says. Yet, on the basis of

<sup>316</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.4. (p. 130); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 122; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 166–167.

<sup>317</sup> *Gesta*, 222.

<sup>318</sup> The Norman host was surrounded and cut off from food supplies, so Guiscard was naturally under pressure to engage in the battle before the horses and soldiers succumbed to hunger and thirst. Further, delaying the crucial engagement too much could provide Alexios Komnenos with more precious time to concentrate even more troops in Epirus.

<sup>319</sup> *Gesta*, 222, 224.

<sup>320</sup> In the period between 15 and 18 October 1081, both parties closely monitored the steps of the enemy, carried out preparations for the upcoming battle, but no combat activities were undertaken. *Gesta*, 224; Malaterra, 584.

<sup>321</sup> This date is based on the fact that the council apparently took place only after Georgios Palaiologos, upon Alexios Komnenos' repeated requests, arrived at the imperial camp at St. Nicholas' church from the besieged Dyrrachion. Palaiologos initially refused to leave Dyrrachion, pleading his responsibilities as the commander of the city's defense and arguing that he should not leave Dyrrachion during the battle (the Normans were still besieging the city). Eventually, persuaded by the emperor's seal ring, the commander arrived presumably aboard a Venetian ship. See *Alexias*, IV.5.2. (p. 129); Kislinger, "Notizen," 133.

some slight indications, he seems to have been more inclined to the direct engagement right from the outset.<sup>322</sup> Senior and more experienced commanders, including Georgios Palaiologos, advised him to proceed indirectly and to starve the Normans out.<sup>323</sup> On the other hand, younger Byzantine aristocrats such as Constantine Doukas, Nikeforos Synadenos, Leo and Nikeforos Diogenes,<sup>324</sup> and the commander of the Varangian guard Nabitr rather opted for a direct approach and urged the emperor to defeat the Normans on the battlefield.<sup>325</sup> Eventually, Alexios Komnenos decided for a face-off. The need for a swift and convincing victory over the Normans, in which the Byzantine emperor would no doubt silence any domestic political opposition to his reign, probably loomed large in his decision-making process. Another possible reason seems to have been Alexios Komnenos' confidence in the assembled military forces, which, as mentioned above, outnumbered the Norman host. Moreover, the overall situation was rather favorable for the Byzantines, who had the advantage of a tactical initiative due to the Venetian victory at sea, while the Normans had to passively wait for the movements of the imperial forces.

Thanks to the reports of Georgios Palaiologos and other spies, Alexios Komnenos knew the precise location of the Norman camp. Therefore, he tried to maximize his chances of success by preparing a surprise attack on the enemy camp from two directions at dawn shortly before the sunrise.<sup>326</sup> The implementation of this battle plan began on the next day, 17 October 1081.<sup>327</sup> The emperor sent part of his forces, consisting mainly of allied Serbs and Seljuks, to bypass the marshlands and attack the Normans from

<sup>322</sup> The emperor asked Palaiologos whether, in his opinion, he ought to risk a battle against Guiscard. If he was inclined to an indirect solution of the conflict, he would have probably asked him, if he thought it was appropriate *not* to fight against the Normans. *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 129): “εί χρη τὸν μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἀποθαρρήσαι πόλεμον.” The second clue indicating that Alexios Komnenos was actively preparing for the engagement with the Normans at the moment is that, as soon as the camp was set up on 15 October 1081, he went out to examine the terrain between the camp and Dyrrachion in person, as any sensible commanding general should do before an upcoming battle. *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 129). Haldon holds the same opinion. Haldon, *Wars*, 134.

<sup>323</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 129–130); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 15; Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 122; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 63.

<sup>324</sup> Nikeforos Diogenes, mentioned by Anna Komnene, was apparently unable to attend this council due to his young age. See note 264.

<sup>325</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.3. (p. 130); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123.

<sup>326</sup> See *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 155; Haldon, *Wars*, 134.

<sup>327</sup> The battle itself took place on 18 October 1081. See note 339.

the north and wreak havoc in their camp.<sup>328</sup> Then, during the night, he moved with the main forces of his army from the camp half-way toward Dyrrachion, so they would be ready to cross the bridge over the lagoon mouth with the first light of the sun. He intended to advance against the Norman camp from the south on the morning of 18 October. Thanks to this careful timing, the Serbian and Seljuk allies had the opportunity to reach their starting positions in time and attack simultaneously with the main forces.<sup>329</sup> Then, the trap would fall, the Norman soldiers would be encircled as “sitting ducks” in their camp, unable to resist. Dyrrachion defenders were understandably due to take part in the upcoming attack, too.<sup>330</sup> The plan thus conceived was very likely to succeed and shows Alexios Komnenos as a tactically experienced and resourceful commander who sought to maximize all the advantages before the crucial encounter.<sup>331</sup>

At the same time, Guiscard faced a serious problem, which was the low morale among a greater part of his troops. At the council, he was able to convince his commanders, who, like him, understood the seriousness of the situation, but the spirits among the rank-and-file soldiers, the vast majority of whom were involuntarily drafted and combat-inexperienced soldiers from Apulia and Calabria, were low.<sup>332</sup> Therefore, in order to strengthen their determination to fight, the Norman duke ordered all the remaining Norman-Dalmatian vessels anchored in the Dyrrachion port to be sunk, possibly with the exception of the much-valued oared warships.<sup>333</sup> At the same time, in the night from 17 to 18 October, he ordered all his soldiers to leave the camp, which he consequently set on fire as well so that it would not fall into enemy hands.<sup>334</sup> The entire Norman host then

<sup>328</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 155; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123.

<sup>329</sup> Kekaumenos also describes an identical way of a surprise attack on the enemy position, considering it one of the most effective tactical maneuvers. See Kekaumenos, 77, 79.

<sup>330</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.3. (p. 133); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 155; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123.

<sup>331</sup> Alexios Komnenos' course of actions before the battle of Dyrrachion was in line with recommendations contained in *Strategikon* by the emperor Maurikios (582–602), according to which the commander is to fight with the enemy only if he has the right opportunity to do so, and all-important advantages are on his side. George T. Dennis and Ernst Gamillscheg, eds. *Das Strategikon des Maurikios in Mauricii Strategikon*, CFHB XVII (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), 165. See also Kekaumenos, 55.

<sup>332</sup> *Gesta*, 224.

<sup>333</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.7. (p. 131); Malaterra, 584; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 122; Stanton, *Operations*, 53.

<sup>334</sup> *Gesta*, 224. In contrast, Malaterra does not mention setting the camp on fire. Malaterra, 584.

crossed the bridge over the lagoon and set itself up across the road to Dyrrachion near St. Theodore's church.<sup>335</sup> Then, Guiscard ordered the bridge to be destroyed, thereby securing his rear.<sup>336</sup> It is difficult to assess whether this strange maneuver was just another attempt of the Norman duke to uplift the morale of his soldiers by showing his determination to fight or whether he had somehow learned of the Byzantine battle plan<sup>337</sup> or whether he took this course of action as a simple measure of precaution on the basis of his ample military experience. In any case, by unexpectedly moving his entire host elsewhere, he entirely thwarted Alexios Komnenos' schemes.<sup>338</sup>

Thus, just before the sunrise on the morning of 18 October 1081,<sup>339</sup> the Byzantine emperor, advancing at the head of the main forces of his army from the Byzantine camp in the northwest direction toward Dyrrachion, was startled when he saw the Norman host lined up in a

<sup>335</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.

<sup>336</sup> *Gesta*, 224; Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123.

<sup>337</sup> Birkenmeier envisages a possibility of the betrayal of pro-Norman individuals among the Byzantines, who informed Guiscard of the upcoming overnight attack on his camp. Although only a speculation, the course of events strongly suggests that the extraordinary measure taken by the duke at this very moment could not have been coincidental. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 63. A possible adept at revealing the emperor's plan was, for example, the ruler of Diokleia Constantine Bodin, who, along with his father Mihailo, probably engaged in secret negotiations with Guiscard already before 1081. Chalandon, *Essai*, 73; Fine, *Balkans*, 222. The reason for it may have been the so-far unfulfilled but urgent wish of Mihailo and Constantine Bodin to have their royal title recognized by the Byzantine imperial court (Mihailo began to use the title before January 1078). For more information, see Komatina, "Титула," 69; Cheynet, "La place de la Serbie dans la diplomatie byzantine à la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *ZRVI* 45 (2008): 95–96. My hypothesis of handing over important information to the Norman duke is to some extent supported by the neutral or even double-dealing behavior of Constantine Bodin during the battle. Yet, given the current state of research, it remains an unconfirmed hypothesis. See text below.

<sup>338</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123. After the transfer to their new positions, the Norman soldiers did not go to sleep, but used the rest of the nighttime for prayers. Moreover, the commanders attended an early morning service probably held in the church of St. Theodore. *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Malaterra, 584; *Historia Sicula*, 770.

<sup>339</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Chalandon, *Essai*, 79; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123; Kislinger, "Notizen," 133.

combat formation and not in the Norman camp as expected.<sup>340</sup> The auxiliary troops of the Seljuk Turks and Serbs, along with the defenders of Dyrrachion, who were supposed to attack the Normans from the rear at the appropriate moment, suddenly found themselves more or less in the role of useless spectators without any possibility to influence the outcome of the battle before it even began. After the Normans destroyed the bridge, the only target within their reach became the abandoned and smoking Norman camp, which they attacked in accordance with the original plan.<sup>341</sup> Alexios Komnenos, whose forces still outnumbered the Normans, decided to press on with the advance despite this serious setback and, after approaching the Normans at a sufficient distance, also arranged his troops in a battle formation.<sup>342</sup> As the Byzantine army was moving along the coast in the northeast direction, and the Normans seem to have set up across the coastal road leading to the destroyed bridge, it is very likely that both hosts eventually took positions with one flank of each formation at the sea coast (Normans with the right and Byzantines with the left wing). The battlefield where the crucial encounter was finally to take place lay in a relatively narrow area bounded in the southwest by the Adriatic coast, in the west by the mouth of the sea lagoon, and in the north and northeast by a low ridge,<sup>343</sup> which stretched from the sea lagoon in the north in parallel with the sea coast, and in the south by the Shimmihl stream, above which rose a promontory of the mountain ridge with St. Michael's church

<sup>340</sup> At this point, both battle formations were about three kilometers apart. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 123. It can be assumed that the Byzantine line-up just passed by St. Michael's church, located on a hilltop near the beach. The exact location of this church is unknown, but it approximately lay near a small watercourse, running into the sea nearby, as visible on U.S. military topographic maps from 1943 and 1956. The watercourse, originally called Shimmihl (St. Michael), ran near a small settlement of the same name. Today, it no longer exists, but its estuary is roughly identical to the mouth of the Lumi Durrësit canal. For possible location of the church, see also Ducellier, *Albanie*, 35; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 125.

<sup>341</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Haldon, *Wars*, 134. To intervene in the battle, these troops had to make a time-consuming detour around the lagoon. The Serbs of Constantine Bodin and the Seljuk Turks probably attempted to return to the Byzantine main forces, once the empty Norman camp was attacked, but finally did not engage in the battle itself because they were still far away from the battlefield when the decisive moment came. See text below.

<sup>342</sup> See text below.

<sup>343</sup> Today, this ridge is called Shkamm. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124.

on top of it.<sup>344</sup> This flat area, slightly sloping toward the sea,<sup>345</sup> was no more than 2000 meters wide and approximately 3000 meters long.

The Norman host took a position at the very northwest end of the area.<sup>346</sup> All existing descriptions of the battle contain very little specific information about its combat formation except for the basic tactical division into three groups—the center and the right and left wings. Robert Guiscard led the center, in which he probably retained the most combat-worthy infantrymen and most of the main strike force of the Norman host—1300 battle-hardened Norman knights.<sup>347</sup> It is possible that Guiscard's second son Guido, nephew Robert the Seneschal and the count of Brienne, *comestabulus* of Apulia, also fought in the center, as well as the knights from the Kingdom of France and from Normandy (Robert Giffard and William of Grandmesnil). Guiscard's son Bohemund took command of the left wing, but the composition of the troops under his command is not further specified.<sup>348</sup> The right wing was commanded by the count Amicus II of Molfetto,<sup>349</sup> and the line-up of this part of the Norman host seems to have contained militias from Salerno headed by Guiscard's wife Sikelgaita, as well as inexperienced light infantrymen composed of fresh levies from Apulia and Calabria.<sup>350</sup> At the last minute, their ranks were also reinforced by sailors from the sunken ships.<sup>351</sup> Peter of Aulps also appears

<sup>344</sup> This ridge gradually rises from about 30 to 90 meters above sea level from northwest to southeast.

<sup>345</sup> *Alexias*, IV.5.2. (p. 129).

<sup>346</sup> Despite the efforts of the Norman duke to lead his troops out of the Byzantine trap, even this new position did not mean any significant improvement. There was a sea coast on their right, a bridge over the estuary of the lagoon behind, and a ridge of low hills rising on the left side. The crampedness of the entire position and the inability to carry out any tactical maneuver is evident from the description of the battle by William of Apulia. *Gesta*, 224, 226.

<sup>347</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.

<sup>348</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156. Mercenary troops, whose presence in Guiscard's army is believed, may have been deployed here, but their composition is unknown. See text above.

<sup>349</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.1. (p. 132); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.

<sup>350</sup> This composition is evident from the further development of events on the right wing, where these parts of the Norman host are mentioned. See text below. Sikelgaita, with the Salernitan troops, was probably tasked, among other things, with ensuring the loyalty of the count Amicus II of Molfetto. See note 148. Eads, "Sichelgaita," 85.

<sup>351</sup> This presumption can be made on the basis of a reference by William of Apulia, in which he mentions the sailors together with the levies from Apulia and Calabria. *Gesta*, 224.

to have fought on the right wing.<sup>352</sup> All three divisions of the Norman battle formation were made up of smaller tactical units called *batailles*,<sup>353</sup> with infantry in the front rows, supported from behind by groups of knights, advancing in tight cavalry formations called *conrois*.<sup>354</sup> Apparently, there were not many archers present in the Norman ranks.<sup>355</sup>

The more numerous Byzantine troops arranged in a similar formation as the Normans, with Alexios Komnenos commanding the center, *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos the right wing, and Gregorios Pakourianos the left one.<sup>356</sup> According to Anna Komnene, there was an array of members of the Varangian guard commanded by Nabitr covering the front of the Byzantine center.<sup>357</sup> Alexios Komnenos deployed the Varangians to this forward position only after observing the Norman host in the distance, so it is possible that this *ad hoc* measure was intended to protect the center

<sup>352</sup>This knight fought in the later stage of the battle alongside the count Amicus II of Molfetto, so it is likely that he was also on the right wing at the beginning of the fight. See text below.

<sup>353</sup>These were cavalry and infantry units of various size (from several hundred to several thousand men). In the battle of Dyrrachion, Guiscard's infantry apparently proceeded before the cavalry, probably to take on the effects of Byzantine archery. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.

<sup>354</sup>A *conrois* consisted of twenty-five to fifty knights. A mark of this smallest tactical unit of mounted knights was a small banner (*gonfanon*) affixed to the commander's spear. Charles Gravett and Christa Hook, *Norman Knight: AD 950–1204* (London: Osprey, 1993), 28.

<sup>355</sup>The preserved descriptions of the course of the battle in the period sources mention only the noticeable effect of Byzantine archery on the ranks of the Norman host; Norman archers are not mentioned at all. For a colorful description of the effect of repeated dense volleys of Byzantine arrows on the Norman left wing, see *Gesta*, 224. Perhaps the insufficient intensity of archery on the Norman side was due to the shipwreck of many transport ships with war supplies back in June near Cape Glossa. Some of them most probably carried thousands of arrows, and therefore their destruction would have visible impact on Norman war effort under the walls of Dyrrachion and during the battle itself.

<sup>356</sup>*Alexias*, IV.6.2. (p. 132); Haldon, *Wars*, 134; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.

<sup>357</sup>*Alexias*, IV.6.2. (p. 133); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.



from the concentrated attacks of the Norman heavy cavalry.<sup>358</sup> In the gap between the Varangians and the center of the Byzantine formation, a strong group of foot archers, whose Alexios Komnenos apparently had much more at his disposal than the Normans, advanced.<sup>359</sup> Unfortunately, the Byzantine princess is silent on the specific composition of the main parts of the Byzantine army. Given the fact that Alexios Komnenos himself was in charge of the center, it is very likely that he kept the units of the *Bestiaritai*, the *Exkoubitai*, the Armenian infantry, as well as the *tagma* of Frankish mercenaries nearby, that is, units with which he personally set off at the beginning of the campaign directly from Constantinople.<sup>360</sup> The aforementioned elite of the Byzantine nobility appears to have fought with the emperor in the center, too, with each member having a strong armed retinue in accordance with the Byzantine customs. Similarly, in the case of the left wing, there were *tagmata* marching under Pakourianos' command,

<sup>358</sup> Birkenmeier, *Army*, 65; Haldon, *Wars*, 135. Heavy defensive equipment of the Varangians, as well as their shield wall tactics, along with the use of a large two-handed axe, constituted an almost insurmountable obstacle, even for the battle-hardened Norman knights. Alexios Komnenos seems to have expected the Anglo-Saxons to be ruthless adversaries of the Norman knights, assuming that they would want to make up for the defeat of their fathers and uncles at Hastings. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 65; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156. According to Malaterra, it was on the contrary the Anglo-Saxon members of the Varangian guard who asked Alexios Komnenos before the battle to fight as a vanguard of the entire Byzantine army. Malaterra, 584: "*Angli vero, quos Waringos appellant, ab Imperatore primitias congressus expetentes.*"; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124. The presence of the Anglo-Saxons on the battlefield is confirmed later in the work of the anonymous chronicler of *Historia Sicula* from the mid-twelfth century. *Historia Sicula*, 770: "*Alexius [...] Anglicos suos [...] in prima acie collocat.*"

<sup>359</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.2. (p. 133); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; See also note 355.

<sup>360</sup> See text above. The center of the Byzantine formation could consist of at least 5000 men. Theotokis adds to this estimate an assumption that it also included the cavalry *tagma* from Thessaly, as well as the *tagma* from Makedonia and Thrace. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156. However, the question is what units would then be deployed on the flanks, if Thessalian and Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata* were located in the center? Moreover, it seems both illogical and impractical for the troops that had gathered under Pakourianos' and Melissenos' command in Adrianoupolis and Thessalonica before the expedition and under their command marched toward Dyrrachion to be suddenly transferred under the emperor's direct command during the battle. The same applies to Theotokis' hypothesis regarding the deployment of the Armenian infantry on the left Byzantine wing under Pakourianos' command. Theotokis argues that the reason for this arrangement was that Pakourianos was of the Armenian origin(!). Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156. For the question of Pakourianos' ethnic origin, see note 260.

which, on Alexios Komnenos' orders, gathered before the start of the campaign in Adrianoupolis, that is, *tagma/tagmata* from Makedonia and Thrace and possibly the *tagma* of the Paulikians.<sup>361</sup> The right wing, under the command of Nikeforos Melissenos, probably consisted of troops which had joined the Byzantine army in Thessalonica, that is, troops from the province of Thessalonike, as well as from Thessaly, and probably also included the Vardariot Turks who could act as flank guards.<sup>362</sup> Like in the Norman host, the infantry marched in the first rows of the Byzantine formation, followed closely by the cavalry.<sup>363</sup>

Looking at the slowly approaching tight ranks of Byzantine soldiers, Guiscard decided to take the initiative, perhaps also because of the rather unfavorable deployment of his troops (Norman troops were tightly packed at the end of the coastal plain with seashore on their right, mouth of the lagoon in their rear, and low ridge on their left). Thus, even before the Byzantines advanced to the contact distance,<sup>364</sup> he signaled all knights from the center of the Norman formation to charge.<sup>365</sup> This onslaught was primarily aimed at the Byzantine center, and its goal was not to break through the Byzantine ranks, but rather to get the attention of the Byzantine soldiers. Guiscard planned to lure them out and make them chase the retreating Normans, causing the Byzantine tight formation to break up in the process, as he hoped.<sup>366</sup> However, the Varangians easily fended off this attack in cooperation with archers and light infantrymen (*peltastai*) and continued in their slow advance toward the Normans shield on shield.<sup>367</sup> Soon, both hosts halted and engaged in minor skirmishes.<sup>368</sup> After a while, in order to disrupt the monolithic Byzantine formation, the

<sup>361</sup> See text above. The left wing is estimated to be 5000–7000 strong.

<sup>362</sup> See text above. The right flank appears to have been relatively the weakest, with an estimate of 4000–5000 men.

<sup>363</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.2. (p. 132–133); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 156.

<sup>364</sup> The soldiers in the front lines were not in close contact with the soldiers of the adversary; there was space between them of just a few long steps to circa fifty meters. For the concept of a *safe distance*, as well as the dynamics of infantry battles in the ancient period (although the author sought inspiration in battles from the Napoleonic wars, but with the possibility of application also to battles in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages), see Philip Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 14–15.

<sup>365</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.3. (p. 133); *Gesta*, 224; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157.

<sup>366</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.3. (p. 133); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 64; Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157.

<sup>367</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.3. (p. 133); Haldon, *Wars*, 135.

<sup>368</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.4. (p. 133).

Norman right wing, led by the count Amicus II of Molfetta, mounted another charge. It did not attack the Byzantine left wing under Gregorios Pakourianos head-on but concentrated its efforts against the gap between the center and the left flank of the Byzantine battle formation, probably with intention to strike the unprotected left side of the Varangian shield wall.<sup>369</sup> This attack was very well-thought-out and would probably also be very damaging for the Byzantines if the right-wing Norman soldiers were more resolute and battle-hardened. Since most of them were inexperienced levies from Apulia and Calabria,<sup>370</sup> the whole attack turned out differently. The Byzantines on the left intercepted and repulsed it instantly. The Norman soldiers then vacillated and attempted at a real (not mock) escape to the nearby beach, sweeping the more experienced foot soldiers of the Salernitan militias with them.<sup>371</sup> Intense archery, which was mercilessly hitting fleeing enemies, also contributed significantly to the fierceness of the Byzantine counterattack.<sup>372</sup> Many enemy soldiers, according to Anna Komnene, panicked and even tried to seek rescue aboard the ships of the Venetian fleet anchoring off the coast.<sup>373</sup> Guiscard's entire left flank has effectively fallen apart at the moment.

Thus, right at the opening stage of the battle, Alexios Komnenos was given an excellent opportunity to turn all his forces against the rest of the Norman host, which would most likely result in the Byzantine victory. At this point, however, the emperor was paradoxically betrayed by the success of his own soldiers, especially the Varangian guard. The Varangians not only managed to fend off the Norman attack, but after seeing the all-out

<sup>369</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.4. (p. 133); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 65; Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157.

<sup>370</sup> These soldiers were suffering from low fighting morale even before the battle. *Gesta*, 224: “Cum Langobardis Calabri terrentur.”

<sup>371</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.4. (p. 133); Haldon, *Wars*, 135. As stated above, the deployment of the Salernitans in the Norman left wing is highly likely, given the presence of Guiscard's wife Sikelgaita.

<sup>372</sup> It was probably at this stage of the battle when Sikelgaita was hit by an arrow. *Gesta*, 224, 226.

<sup>373</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.4. (p. 133); Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 446; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124–125; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157. William of Apulia apologetically explains this movement of the entire Norman left wing toward the beach as an attempt to gain space to regroup after the fierce Byzantine attack, but because of the tight space of this part of the battlefield, many soldiers were simply pushed into the sea (according to the Norman chronicler, they did not actually run away). *Gesta*, 224; Eads, “Sichelgaita,” 80.

roust of the Norman right wing, they embarked on its vigorous pursuit.<sup>374</sup> By this, however, they made a fundamental and fatal mistake by abandoning their designated places in the battle formation and leaving thus the Byzantine center suddenly unprotected.<sup>375</sup> Moreover, while pursuing the panicking Normans, their own ranks completely lost cohesion to such an extent that, after some time, they found themselves separated from the rest of the Byzantine army without the crucial support of light infantry and archers, who did not follow them in pursuit.<sup>376</sup> The more disciplined left wing under Pakourianos' command seemed content with fending off the Norman charge and probably held its ground waiting for further instructions and hoping that the Varangians would manage to regroup

<sup>374</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 15; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 65; Haldon, *Wars*, 135.

<sup>375</sup> The reason why the Varangians left their place in the formation is rightly one of the most discussed moments of the battle of Dyrrachion, since their lack of discipline allowed Guiscard to take full advantage of his superiority in heavy cavalry. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 160. The battle of Hastings in 1066 is very often likened to this battle, as a similar incident with the same result occurred at the time. At Hastings, the Anglo-Saxons in the right wing pursued the retreating Normans, finding themselves suddenly cut off during the unexpected Norman counterattack. This analogy may be much deeper than it seems at first glance, as several individuals with direct connection to the battle of Hastings fought on both sides at Dyrrachion. Besides some Hastings veterans, there were mostly sons and nephews of the defeated Anglo-Saxons in the Varangian guard. Shephard, "English," 77–78. They were not only motivated to avenge the defeat of their forefathers, but also relatively young and inexperienced, as confirmed by Anna Komnene. The Byzantine princess does not specify the reason for this inexperience, which is quite paradoxical because the Varangians were supposed to be the elite unit of the Byzantine army. *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134). The Norman host also included individuals whose relatives fought at the battle of Hastings, namely Robert Giffard and William of Grandmesnil (see note 143). Their one-generation-older relatives (Osbern Giffard and Hugo of Grandmesnil) were close advisers of the duke of Normandy, William the Bastard. As such, they surely gained knowledge how to deal with the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall tactics and probably shared this useful military knowledge within their families.

<sup>376</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134); Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157.

and restore the formation.<sup>377</sup> Yet, the situation of the Varangians was potentially getting more and more dangerous by every minute, as many fighters, burdened with their heavy protective equipment, soon got extremely tired as a result of the rapid pursuit.<sup>378</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the first to orient himself in this complex combat situation was Guiscard, who after all was more experienced than the Byzantine emperor. While leaving the reorganization of the routed right wing to his subordinate commanders, he concentrated all his best knights in an attack against the exposed Byzantine center.<sup>379</sup> Norman infantry opened its ranks and the knights, lined up in tight *convois*, charged in a very disciplined manner. Soon, the predominance of the Norman heavier equipment and weapons became apparent and the center of the Byzantine army, stripped of the protection of the Varangian shield wall, began to crumble under their repeated blows.<sup>380</sup> As a result, Alexios Komnenos, surrounded by his bodyguards and elite *tagmata* from Constantinople, lost even the tiniest

<sup>377</sup> Haldon assumes that the Byzantine left wing fell apart as a result of the pursuit of the defeated Norman right wing. Haldon, *Wars*, 135. However, the sources do not support this view. For instance, Anna Komnene says that the Varangians had advanced some distance from the Byzantine line, meaning that the Byzantines were still holding their ground and not falling apart. *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134). On the other hand, Birkenmeier puts the blame squarely on Alexios Komnenos' shoulders for not supporting the attack of the Varangian guard. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 66. However, he does not take into account the fact that, once the battle started in earnest, Alexios Komnenos, fighting in the center, had little chance to influence what was happening on the left wing. The responsibility for this part of the battlefield lay on *meGas domestikos* Pakourianos. There is also an indication that at least some left-wing soldiers followed the Varangians. William of Apulia describes how unspecified Byzantine soldiers, considering the Normans defeated (particularly those on the right wing), began to plunder and collect weapons and objects left on the battlefield by their fleeing opponents. *Gesta*, 224.

<sup>378</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134); Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 125.

<sup>379</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 134); Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 125; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 158. Before the decisive attack, Guiscard was said to have boosted the morale of his knights with a rousing speech in which he reminded them that the whole encounter had a blessing from the pope Gregory VII himself and that St. Mathew, to whom he had recently commissioned the Cathedral of Salerno, was on their side. *Gesta*, 226.

<sup>380</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 134); Haldon, *Wars*, 135. For example, it would be interesting to find a testimony on how well a unit of Norman mercenaries under the command of Constantine Houmbertopoulos fought in the center of the Byzantine formation (they probably fought against their relatives under Guiscard's command). However, written sources do not provide information on these interesting aspects of the battle. Nevertheless, based on an unknown testimony, Savvidis claims that Constantine Houmbertopoulos and his Normans fought bravely(!). Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 53.

possibility of direct tactical command and, from that moment on, was only desperately fighting off the concerted Norman attacks against his position.<sup>381</sup> It is likely that it was at this stage of the battle that most of the members of the Byzantine nobility from emperor's entourage were killed or wounded,<sup>382</sup> as well as many of the rank-and-file soldiers of the *Bestiaritai*, the *Exkoubitai*, and the Armenian infantry units. The right-wing units commanded by Melissenos and the left-wing units under Pakourianos seem to have failed to effectively support the hard-pressed center and, acknowledging their impotence, slowly began to retreat from the battlefield. The same applies to the troops that Alexios Komnenos had sent the previous day to attack the Norman camp. The Seljuks and the Serbs, who apparently managed to return to the immediate vicinity of the battlefield, probably noticed the unfavorable turn in the battle and decided that they were unable to help the emperor and withdrew as well.<sup>383</sup>

The reconstruction of the final phase of the battle of Dyrrachion is a very hard nut to crack because, in addition to the general statements and certain indications in the written sources, there is only a description of Alexios Komnenos' heroic resistance and miraculous retreat, as narrated by Anna Komnene, which is very detailed, but completely overshadows

<sup>381</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 134).

<sup>382</sup> Some of the noblemen killed in battle are mentioned by name—Constantinos Doukas, Nikeforos Synadenos, Nikeforos Palaiologos (father of the commander of Dyrrachion, Georgios Palaiologos), and Zacharias (Pakourianos?). Ōšin/Aspietes was among the wounded. *Alexias*, IV.6.7. (p. 134–135); Zonaras, 735; *Gesta*, 226; Chalandon, *Essai*, 79; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 126.

<sup>383</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.9. (p. 135–136); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 126; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 158. However, once again, the description by Anna Komnene at this point is not entirely accurate, as William of Apulia referred to the number of Turks who fell during the battle. *Gesta*, 226. Therefore, it is possible that the Serbs of Diokleia, under the command of Constantine Bodin, retreated without a single blow, but some of the Seljuk allies bravely charged against the advancing Normans, in spite of the fact that their efforts could no longer change the final outcome of the battle.

actions in other parts of the battlefield.<sup>384</sup> In spite of this fact several assumptions can be made. The left wing of the Byzantine formation, led expertly by Pakourianos, seems to have managed to make an orderly retreat to the Byzantine camp near St. Nicholas' church behind the Shimmihl stream, because, except for about 300 casualties from among the *tagma* of the Paulikians,<sup>385</sup> no other significant losses were recorded, meaning that the Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata* withdrew from the battle virtually unscathed. As a result, left wing units remained fully operational, and a few years later Alexios Komnenos deployed them in the war against the Pechenegs.<sup>386</sup> Theoretically, the 300 Paulikians could have died as a result of the efforts of Gregorios Pakourianos to aid the Byzantine center, or during the subsequent retreat to the camp, in which Pakourianos set aside the Paulikians to cover the retreat.<sup>387</sup> The right Byzantine wing, under Nikeforos Melissenos' command, is hardly mentioned in the description of the battle, so it is highly likely that *kaisar* just ordered his troops to hold their ground and wait for instructions, which did not come

<sup>384</sup> The Normans apparently tried to kill or capture the Byzantine emperor (exactly in this order) during a bloody *mélée* that ensued after the disintegration of the Byzantine center, and it is very likely that this was done on Guiscard's express orders (as was the case in the battle of Hastings in 1066, where the Norman archers and knights killed king Harold directly on the battlefield). After the battle, the Norman duke became very angry with his subordinates for failing this task and returning empty-handed. *Alexias*, IV.8.2. (p. 139). Among the Norman knights who explicitly tried to kill Alexios Komnenos, Anna Komnene mentions the count Amicus II of Molpetto and Peter of Aulps. In particular, the attack by Peter of Aulps with a sword directed at the emperor's head was very dangerous, and only thanks to his rapid reaction did Alexios Komnenos lose "only" his helmet. *Alexias*, IV.7.8. (p. 135, 136–138); Haldon, *Wars*, 135. William of Apulia states that the fight was "fierce" without adding any further details. *Gesta*, 226. Malaterra, like Anna Komnene, focuses on the description of the last resistance of the Varangians. Malaterra, 584. Therefore, the subsequent attempt to reconstruct the final phase of the battle of Dyrrachion is by its nature rather speculative.

<sup>385</sup> According to Anna Komnene, their numerical strength after the battle was 2500 men. *Alexias*, V.3.2. (p. 146); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 158.

<sup>386</sup> Specifically, this unit took part in the battle of Dristra in the autumn of 1087. See text below.

<sup>387</sup> It is possible that this "sacrifice" had badly shaken the morale of this unit, resulted in their unauthorized departure (defection) from the battlefield, and later was the main reason behind their insubordination. This led to their collective punishment in the autumn of 1083. *Alexias*, V.3.2. (p. 146), VI.2.1.–4. (p. 170–171). See also text below.

in the end.<sup>388</sup> When Melissenos realized that the Byzantine center was being crushed under the concerted attacks of Norman heavy cavalry, he probably signaled a retreat. This can be assumed by the fact that the troops under his command did not suffer any significant losses, as they were also later deployed in the military operations during the war against the Pechenegs.<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, it can also be assumed that the route of their retreat, given the unfavorable development of the situation on the battlefield, where the Norman cavalry dominated, did not lead to the Byzantine camp near St. Nicholas' church, but eastward where the first Byzantine camp was located near the Charzanes river, distant no more than five kilometers as the crow flies.

Contrary to the preserved descriptions of the battle, it was only around this time that the fate of the Varangians, who found themselves isolated on the sea coast after their undisciplined sortie against the Norman right wing, was about to be fulfilled. First, their disorderly ranks were attacked from the side by the Norman infantry, causing them significant losses.<sup>390</sup>

<sup>388</sup>The absence of information about the Byzantine right wing was also noted by Haldon, who assumes that this part of the imperial army disintegrated practically without striking a blow. Haldon, *Wars*, 135. This is hard to imagine. Similarly, Holmes believes (although with no support in the sources) that the right wing was defeated by the Norman left wing led by Bohemund. Robert C. L. Holmes, "Men of the North Wind the Norman Knight in the 11th Century Mediterranean," *American International Journal of Social Science* 4 (2015): 77. It is possible that *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos' apparent inaction during the battle was based on his hidden personal agenda—the victory in the battle over the Normans would strengthen Alexios Komnenos' position as the emperor, which was not entirely in his interest. After all, only a few months ago, Alexios and Nikeforos were rivals, and both tried to win the imperial crown for themselves. Eventually, Alexios prevailed, and Nikeforos had to settle for the lower imperial title of *kaisar*, originally the second highest in the Byzantine court hierarchy (the highest was, of course, *autokratōr*). But even in this regard, Alexios Komnenos humiliated him as soon as he became the emperor; he created a new title of *sebastokratōr* for his older brother Isaakios, who was thus second in the hierarchy, and *kaisar* was sidelined to the third place. For this, see *Alexias*, III.4.1. (p. 95); Zonaras, 731–732. On the other hand, it is also possible that Anna's silence on Melissenos' actions on the battlefield under Dyrrachion is based on her personal antipathy toward Melissenos, who was also her uncle. For specific examples, see Frankopan, "Melissenos," 166–169. Signs of betrayal were assumed by Yewdale as one of the causes of the Byzantine defeat, but he did not specify his suspicions in more detail nor did he provide concrete evidence from the sources. See Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 15.

<sup>389</sup>Namely, the *tagma* from Thessaly in the battle of Dristra and again under the command of *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos. See text below.

<sup>390</sup>Malaterra, 584; Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 125; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157.



Subsequently, the Normans prevented the Varangians from returning to the main Byzantine battle formation (e.g., to the Byzantine left wing, which may have been retreating by the time, but had a lead of several tens to hundreds of meters). Thus, their only chance was to break through the encirclement along the seashore and seek protection in the Byzantine camp near St. Nicholas' church. Given the overall exhaustion and the often-overlooked fact that the Byzantine camp was at least four kilometers away from the battlefield, it is not surprising that most soldiers probably died during this tiresome and lengthy retreat. In the end, not even one member of the Varangian guard reached the relative safety of the camp. Instead, a handful of surviving Varangians managed to get to St. Michael's church, with an aim to find refuge inside. Some of them even may have climbed onto the roof in a desperate attempt to save themselves. The pursuing Normans, firmly determined not to let them escape, surrounded the church, put wooden logs around it, and set it on fire.<sup>391</sup> No one survived.<sup>392</sup>

It is clear that the Byzantine troops retreating toward the camp were pursued by a substantial part of the Norman center under Guiscard's command, because it was the Norman duke who personally seized the rich booty in the form of the imperial tent and all the other equipment in the camp.<sup>393</sup> When ransacking the camp, the Normans massacred all the servants and soldiers present belonging to the Byzantine baggage train mercilessly.<sup>394</sup> The still-resilient Alexios Komnenos, with a handful of loyal followers by his side, was pursued and attacked by other units of the Norman host, which at this point must have split into several parts in

<sup>391</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134). Malaterra makes no comment about the Normans setting the church on fire, but says that it was the collapse of the roof, caused by overload due to high concentration of the Varangians on the roof, that killed the Varangians cramped inside the church. Malaterra, 584. See also *Historia Sicula*, 771.

<sup>392</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 134); Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 125; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157. However, the complete elimination of the Varangians in the battle of Dyrrachion did not mean its absolute demise, as earlier scholars, under the spell of suggestive narration of the Byzantine princess, believed. This elite unit really suffered significant losses, but only part of it fought at Dyrrachion. Smaller Varangian troops continued to fight the Normans; later, the Varangian guard also took part in the war against the Pechenegs. See text below.

<sup>393</sup> *Alexias*, IV.7.1. (p. 136); Zonaras, 735; Malaterra, 584; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 65; Blöndal, *Varangians*, 126; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 126.

<sup>394</sup> This is based on a claim of William of Apulia, saying that Guiscard did not want to stay in the Byzantine camp for long “*due to decomposing corpses.*” *Gesta*, 228; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 127–128.

order to chase fleeing Byzantine soldiers more effectively.<sup>395</sup> Since Bohemund, at the head of the Norman left flank, is mentioned too much neither in the preserved descriptions of the battle, which seems to reflect the aforementioned inaction of the Byzantine right wing, nor in connection with the attacks on Alexios Komnenos' position, all the Norman infantry as well as knights from the left wing probably maintained their position on the battlefield in case of an unexpected event.<sup>396</sup> The Byzantine emperor was thus mainly pursued by the right-wing cavalry, which in the meantime was able to regroup back into battle formation.<sup>397</sup> This is apparent from the text of the *Alexiad*, according to which the right-wing commander, count Amicus II of Molfetta, as well as the knight Peter of Aulps, was personally involved in the pursuit.<sup>398</sup> Despite great efforts of Norman knights, Alexios Komnenos managed to escape, thanks to the endurance of his fine warhorse Sgouritzes and the top quality of his protective armor. After shaking off his pursuers in a final act of ultimate bravado and after two days of wandering through the rugged Epirotic mountains, the Byzantine emperor safely reached Ochrid.<sup>399</sup>

The heavy defeat at the battle of Dyrrachion had very unpleasant consequences for the Byzantines. Not only did Alexios Komnenos fail to

<sup>395</sup> Pursuit of the defeated enemy has traditionally been a matter of cavalymen.

<sup>396</sup> Guiscard's order not to pursue the fleeing Byzantines too vigorously was probably directed to this part of his host. Malaterra, 584. This, of course, did not apply to the pursuit of Alexios Komnenos himself, as evidenced by Guiscard's rage when the Norman knights returned empty-handed. *Alexias*, IV.8.2. (p. 139).

<sup>397</sup> According to Anna Komnene's narration, the Norman soldiers on the left wing regained courage as a result of the intervention of Guiscard's wife Sikelgaita, who, like the reborn goddess Pallas Athena, was galloping on horseback along the beach and, in a powerful voice, brandishing her spear in her hand, made the panicked soldiers, trying to find salvation in the waves and on board of the Venetian ships, return to fight. *Alexias*, IV.6.5. (p. 133); Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 124. According to William of Apulia, however, Sikelgaita was wounded by an arrow, and frightened for her life, she tried to save herself aboard a Venetian ship. On the contrary, it was Guiscard himself who, showing the banner of St. Peter and delivering a rousing speech (perhaps peppered with some earthy expressions), stopped the fleeing soldiers and returned them to battle. *Gesta*, 226; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 446. Since Anna Komnene wrote her historical work more than half a century after the described events and William of Apulia between 1095 and 1099 (see note 64), a less heroic version of Sikelgaita's performance in the battle of Dyrrachion is more likely. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 125. For the opposite view, see Eads, "Sichelgaita," 86; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 53.

<sup>398</sup> *Alexias*, IV.6.6. (p. 135). See also note 384.

<sup>399</sup> *Alexias*, IV.8.4 (p. 140); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 65; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 447; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 165.

destroy the Norman invading host and relieve Dyrrachion, but the Byzantine army also suffered serious material and human losses. Medieval as well as modern estimates assume that there were 5000–6000 casualties on the Byzantine side (25% loss).<sup>400</sup> Nevertheless, Alexios Komnenos managed to gradually rally the survivors of the battle in the town of Ochrid and, as winter approached, let them spend the winter there. However, as a result of the unexpected and heavy losses, surviving units were deeply demoralized and in urgent need of replacing the lost equipment and experienced soldiers by the influx of new recruits. Yet, the effective and rapid renewal of their battle-readiness was hampered by the financial problems mentioned above, which were only exacerbated in the aftermath of the defeat at Dyrrachion. Moreover, Alexios Komnenos and his generals needed to find a new and more effective way to counter the attack of Norman heavy cavalry, as it was the heavy cavalry that proved to be the main cause of the Byzantine defeat. But all the measures required time. Fortunately for the Byzantines, the harsh Balkan winter was slowly coming, forcing a break in combat operations on both sides until the spring of the following year.<sup>401</sup> After the battle, Guiscard allowed his men to hold celebrations for several days, topped with the distribution of rich booty among the rank-and-file soldiers.<sup>402</sup> Indeed, it was high time to secure an adequate place to winter for his tired host.<sup>403</sup> He could not return to his original camp under the walls of Dyrrachion, because this was torched by his orders prior to the battle, nor was the plundered Byzantine camp

<sup>400</sup> Lupus Protospatharius, 45; Haldon, *Wars*, 137; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 126. For this reason, the battle of Dyrrachion can be considered, at least from the military point of view, a worse defeat than the battle of Manzikert. Stephenson, *Frontier*, 167.

<sup>401</sup> Loud, *Guiscard*, 218.

<sup>402</sup> *Historia Sicula*, 771: “Nocte illa et sequenti die triumphantibus gaudiis solemnibus ibidem celebratis, omnibusque divitibus Graecorum spoliis abundanter locupletatis.”

<sup>403</sup> The Norman host did not incur as many casualties as the Byzantines in the battle of Dyrrachion. William of Apulia claims that there were only thirty dead Norman knights. *Gesta*, 226. This is certainly a suspiciously low figure, because as a result of the disintegration of the Norman right wing, dense Byzantine archery, and furious counterattack of the Varangian guard, the losses must have been much more significant (at least several hundred soldiers). Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 129. However, as mentioned above, the Norman host must have felt the first effects of the Venetian naval blockade already before the battle. In this context, there is a very interesting mention of numerous Norman deserters who, despite overwhelming victory, preferred to surrender to the Venetians in Dyrrachion rather than to remain under Guiscard’s command and face an uncertain fate during the upcoming harsh Epirotic winter. *Gesta*, 228.

suitable for a longer stay due to the high risk of infectious diseases.<sup>404</sup> Eventually, the Normans retreated south to the lower Deabolis river,<sup>405</sup> where they built a wooden castle named *Mons Guiscardi* in honor of the victorious duke. For the time being, they accumulated supplies from the surrounding area and abandoned the idea of continuing the siege of Dyrrachion. Instead, the Normans settled for a kind of distant blockade.<sup>406</sup>

Thanks to this turn of events, Alexios Komnenos still nurtured some hope that Dyrrachion would be able to withstand the Norman pressure at least until the spring of 1082. Given the fact that Georgios Palaiologos was unable to return to the city due to the events on the battlefield,<sup>407</sup> Alexios Komnenos had to entrust the defense of the city to those forces he still had at his disposal in Epirus. They consisted of a large and influential community of the Venetians living in Dyrrachion under the leadership of the anonymous son of the doge Domenico Silvio,<sup>408</sup> as well as city militias composed of local population, represented by a certain Komiskortes of

<sup>404</sup> See note 394.

<sup>405</sup> *Gesta*, 228; Malaterra, 584; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 16. The exact location of the Norman camp is unknown, although some authors deem the site of Glabinitza, where Guiscard stopped in early June 1081 during his march to Dyrrachion, to be their wintering place. For example, see Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 448; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 133. However, as Guiscard’s men were raiding the vicinity of Dyrrachion from time to time to keep the defenders alert, it is clear that the site of the new castle as well as the Norman winter camp could not have been located too far away. If Glabinitza is identical to the town of Ballsh (see note 213), this distance would be 84 km as the crow flies (106 km on today’s roads). Therefore, *Mons Guiscardi* was probably not located as far as Glabinitza, but rather somewhere nearer, perhaps south of today’s town of Lushnjë, that is, in the southern part of the fertile coastal plain of Myzeqeja (approximately forty kilometers closer to Dyrrachion than Glabinitza). Another possible location is the northern bend of the Deabolis river south of today’s town of Elbasan, see Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 129.

<sup>406</sup> *Gesta*, 228; Malaterra, 584; *Historia Sicula*, 771; Chalandon, *Essai*, 83; Ducellier, *Albanie*, 20. Guiscard intended to use the break in the hostilities to hire new mercenaries. *Alexias*, V.1.1 (p. 141).

<sup>407</sup> *Alexias*, IV.8.4 (p. 140); Chalandon, *Essai*, 79; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 447; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 127. Based on this fact, Holmes incorrectly infers that the soldiers making up the city garrison were unable to return to Dyrrachion, too. Holmes, “Norman,” 77. He is wrong about this, since the defenders of Dyrrachion did not actually intervene in the battle itself for the above reasons, and it was only Georgios Palaiologos alone who fought in the battle formation alongside the emperor. See text above.

<sup>408</sup> *Gesta*, 228, 230; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 127; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 167.

Albanian origin.<sup>409</sup> The former were supposed to secure the citadel, and the rest of the city was put under the command of the latter.<sup>410</sup> However, the Venetian fleet, which helped the Byzantines so much in the early stages of the conflict, had to return to Venice for the winter.<sup>411</sup> Having secured Dyrrachion and handed over command of the remaining Byzantine troops in the Balkans to *meγas domestikos* Pakourianos, the emperor left Ochrid for the town of Deabolis<sup>412</sup> and from there returned via Thessalonica to Constantinople probably in late December 1081 or early January 1082.<sup>413</sup> In the end, however, his stay in the Byzantine capital during the winter of 1081/1082 was soon disrupted by particularly unfavorable news—Dyrrachion fell by betrayal and without a fight into the Norman hands on 21 February 1082.<sup>414</sup> According to Anna Komnene, the blame for this loss lay on the shoulders of the Venetians and a certain Amalfitan resident of

<sup>409</sup> *Alexias*, IV.8.4. (p. 140): “τῶ ἐξ τῶν Ἀρβάνων ὀρωμένῳ Κομισκόρτῃ.” This passage from the *Alexiad* is one of the first historical references to the Albanians and, therefore, provoked intense discussions in the past. See Era L. Vranoússi, “Οἱ ὄροι ‘Ἀλβανοί’ καὶ ‘Ἀρβανίται’ καὶ ἡ πρώτη μνεῖα τοῦ οὐνόμου λαοῦ τῆς Βαλκανικῆς εἰς τὰς πηγὰς τοῦ 11<sup>ου</sup> αἰῶνα,” *Symmeikta* 2 (1970): 238–245; Ducellier, “Arbanon,” 360–346; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 164; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 55; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 167.

<sup>410</sup> *Alexias*, IV.8.4. (p. 140); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 165. Komiskortes received necessary instructions from the emperor in letters, which also shows that the Norman siege of Dyrrachion was not too tight. See also Dölger, *Regesten*, 25, no. 1075. For authorizing the Venetians with the defense of the citadel, see *Gesta*, 228.

<sup>411</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.1. (p. 141); Böhm, *Flota*, 122. Kislinger doubts that the support by the Venetian fleet continued also during the winter months of 1081/1082. Kislinger, “Notizen,” 133.

<sup>412</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142); Chalandon, *Essai*, 79–80. This place must not be confused with the river of the same name. However, the location cannot be pinpointed, although it must have been situated not too far from Kastoria somewhere on the upper Deabolis river. See Ducellier, *Albanie*, 18–19. It is likely that *kastron* Deabolis was located somewhere northwest of the present-day town of Korçë (Koritsa) in the vicinity of Koklë. Bünnemann locates the fortress in roughly the same space, but a little more to the west, closer to Kastoria (directly to the south or south-southeast of Lake Ochrid), to the site of Zvezdë. Bünnemann, *Guiscard*, 130.

<sup>413</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.2. (p. 146).

<sup>414</sup> *Gesta*, 230; Chalandon, *Essai*, 83. Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 448; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 133; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 166. For the assumption that Alexios Komnenos learned about the loss of Dyrrachion only after he returned to Constantinople, see Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1257.

Dyrrachion.<sup>415</sup> William of Apulia and Malaterra accuse a certain Venetian resident of Dyrrachion, named Domenico, of surrendering the city to Guiscard in pursuit of his own ambitions.<sup>416</sup> No matter which scenario actually took place, the result was identical. The most important Byzantine foothold on the coast of Epirus was now under the control of the Normans,<sup>417</sup> and Guiscard could fully prepare for his next move.

The new Norman offensive in the first months of 1082 thus focused on advance eastward along the Via *Egnatia*. However, the passage in this direction was blocked by the superbly fortified town of Ochrid, as well as by other Byzantine strongholds located near the lakes of Ochrid and Prespa. To mount an attack would undoubtedly be time-consuming, and the Norman duke did not have the necessary resources for lengthy siege operations, regardless of the fact that his host was still exhausted after the long siege of Dyrrachion.<sup>418</sup> Therefore, Guiscard smartly decided to bypass the heavily defended locations from the south, across the upper course of the Haliakmon river. Yet, the Normans run there into another formidable

<sup>415</sup> According to Anna Komnene, the Venetians and the Amalfitans convened a council to find a way out of the difficult situation in which Dyrrachion found itself at the turn of 1081/1082. *Alexias*, V.1.2. (p. 141); Chalandon, *Essai*, 83–84; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 169; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 448. The situation was undoubtedly getting more and more serious after other towns and fortresses in the hinterland opened the gates to Guiscard during this period. Malaterra, 584. This fact might be the principal reason why the Venetians and the Amalfitans decided to surrender to the Normans as well. It is also worth noting that the Amalfitans had been formal Guiscard's subjects since 1073.

<sup>416</sup> According to both Norman chroniclers, Domenico found it difficult that the unnamed son of the doge Domenico Silvio ignored his counsel and advice on matters relating to the defense of the city. As his pride was hurt, he resolved to secretly contact Guiscard via a traitor from Bari. The Norman duke was promised access to Dyrrachion in exchange for appropriate financial reward and the hand of Guiscard's niece. *Gesta*, 228; Malaterra, 584–585; Chalandon, *Essai*, 84; Loud, *Guiscard*, 218; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 448; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 128. According to Theotokis' theory, Domenico may have been the son of the former Venetian doge Otto Orseolo (1008–1026, 1030–1032), which would explain the rivalry between him and Domenico Silvio's son. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 166. For the fate of Otto Orseolo and the strife between the Orseolo and Silvio families, see Nicol, *Venice*, 45–49.

<sup>417</sup> Fortimundus of Rossano became the commander of the Norman garrison of Dyrrachion. Malaterra, 585; *Historia Sicula*, 771; Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1256.

<sup>418</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 129–130. Guiscard possibly intended to achieve the element of surprise by attacking the Byzantines from an unexpected direction. Böhm, “Rola Kastorii podczas wojny normano-byzantińskiej z lat 1081–1085,” *Prace uczestników stadium doktoranckiego historia, pedagogika* 10 (2009): 11–12.

obstacle represented by the city of Kastoria.<sup>419</sup> This city's sturdy walls were strongly manned by a garrison of approximately 300 members of the Varangian guard.<sup>420</sup> Guiscard was forced to halt his advance and arrange the transport of his siege engines from Dyrrachion to Kastoria. It was only under the threat of using them that the defenders of Kastoria agreed to surrender the city at the turn of March and April 1082. Yet again, the Normans were free to resume their advance further east.<sup>421</sup>

Fortunately for the Byzantines, some of the diplomatic activities, which Alexios Komnenos initiated as early as June 1081, slowly started to bear fruit during the winter and spring of 1082. Particularly precious in this respect was an agreement with the Holy Roman emperor Henry IV. The aim of this alliance was to exert pressure on Guiscard's main ally and protector in Italy the pope Gregory VII. If Henry IV advanced to Rome with a large army, the serious threat to the papal authority would force Guiscard to abandon his conquests in Epirus and return to Italy to provide military aid to his benefactor. The beginning of 1082 brought a very promising development in favor of the Byzantine emperor, since Henry IV finally appeared with his troops near Rome at the end of February.<sup>422</sup> Alexios Komnenos sent a new delegation from Constantinople in early April 1082,

<sup>419</sup> Kastoria was strategically located on the crossroads connecting the Via *Egnatia* with the southern part of Epirus, as well as central Greece. The city was situated on a peninsula projecting into the lake of the same name, having thus high defensive potential. Yet, its vicinity was mainly populated by the Slavs and the Vlachs, whose loyalty to imperial administration was far from firm. To some extent, Guiscard probably counted on their support, which could be the reason why he chose to advance in this direction. Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 16; Böhm, "Kastoria," 11–13. For a further description of Kastoria, see text and note 612.

<sup>420</sup> Malaterra, 585; *Historia Sicula*, 771–772; Glavinas, "Καστοριά," 1255–1256; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 130; Kislinger, "Notizen," 134; Böhm, "Kastoria," 12.

<sup>421</sup> After the fall of Kastoria, many Byzantine soldiers defected to the Normans and other fortresses located nearby apparently surrendered, too. Malaterra, 585; Chalandon, *Essai*, 84; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 167; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 130. The question of the ethnicity of their inhabitants and garrisons (Byzantines, Slavs/Bulgarians, Vlachs) remains open, but it is very probable that with their guidance the Normans got valuable geographical knowledge of this part of the Balkans and were able to travel off the main traffic routes controlled by the net of Byzantine strongholds. Böhm considers most of the defectors to be the Vlachs. Böhm, "Kastoria," 12–14. Savvidis mistakenly dates the fall of Kastoria to April 1082, arguing that Guiscard headed toward Kastoria because he wanted to avoid the Byzantine forces led by Alexios Komnenos, operating around Ochrid(sic!). Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 56.

<sup>422</sup> Lupus Protospatharius, 45; Loud, *Guiscard*, 220; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 131; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 452.

headed by a certain Methymnos, undoubtedly to remind the Holy Roman emperor of his obligations concerning Guiscard's territories in Apulia.<sup>423</sup> Likewise, emperor's appeals to rebellious Norman nobles (namely Herman of Canne)<sup>424</sup> fell on the fertile land, as a new revolt against the Hauteville rule swept through Apulia at the turn of 1082.<sup>425</sup> News of these grave events<sup>426</sup> quickly spread to the opposite side of the Otranto Strait and from there soon reached Kastoria. Guiscard immediately suspended military operations against Alexios Komnenos and decided to return with his

<sup>423</sup> *Alexias*, V.3.1. (p. 146); Lounghis, *Ambassades*, 247; Dölger, *Regesten*, 27, no. 1080; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 171; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 167. Savvidis mistakenly names Constantine Chiroisfaktes as the main ambassador during this mission. Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 55. This experienced diplomat had actually led a previous embassy to Henry IV. See text above. Unfortunately for the Byzantines, the much-anticipated campaign of Henry IV to the south of Italy did not actually take place until two years later, in February and March 1084. See Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 137–138; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 460–462.

<sup>424</sup> Herman of Canne was a half-brother of Guiscard's nephew Abelard and spent some time at the imperial court in Constantinople (as did Abelard). He also took active role in all previous rebellions against Guiscard and was captured and imprisoned in 1076. Therefore, he had many personal reasons to oppose Guiscard at any appropriate opportunity, and Alexios Komnenos could not have chosen a better recipient of his requests. See Raffaele Iorio, "Ermanno di Canne contro Roberto il Guiscardo," *Roberto il Guiscardo tra Europa, Oriente e Mezzogiorno—Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio (Potenza-Melfi-Venosa, 19–23 ottobre 1985)*, ed. by Damiano Fonseca. (Potenza, 1990), 119–121, 134. For Guiscard's imprisonment of Herman, see Malaterra, 577. Canne is today's village of Canne della Battaglia near Barletta, Apulia.

<sup>425</sup> The population of Apulian towns of Canne, Bari, Melfi, and Ascoli rose against Guiscard's son Roger, as well as the inhabitants of town of Troia, where he was present at the time, so he and his entourage had to defend themselves in the city's fortified citadel. *Gesta*, 230, 232. The leaders of the uprising included Herman of Canne and Abelard, who only recently returned to Apulia from the Byzantine exile (undoubtedly equipped with sufficient funds from the emperor). The insurgents were joined by another rebellious Guiscard's nephew, Geoffroi of Conversano, who besieged the town of Oriia that remained loyal to Roger Borsa. Malaterra, 586; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 273; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219–220; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 131; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 451; Iorio, "Ermanno," 134. In fact, list of the most important rebels was identical with the names of leaders of the previous uprising suppressed by Guiscard in 1080.

<sup>426</sup> Guiscard received several letters from the pope Gregory VII asking him for immediate military assistance. Malaterra, 586; Orderic Vitalis, 20; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 132. Chalandon believes that the pope even promised Guiscard the imperial crown for his help. See Chalandon, *Essai*, 84.



closest entourage aboard two ships to Otranto at the end of April 1082.<sup>427</sup> His aim was to provide help to his son Roger Borsa and then head north to Rome and lend a military hand to the pope. Before he left, he officially appointed his son Bohemund as the ruler over the conquered Byzantine territory in Epirus and, at the same time, the commander-in-chief of the entire Norman expeditionary host in his absence<sup>428</sup> and the *comestabulus* of Apulia, the count of Brienne, as the second-in-command of the young (and still rather inexperienced) Bohemund.<sup>429</sup>

### 4.3.2 *Bohemund's Offensive (1082–1083)*

After Guiscard's forced departure to southern Italy, Bohemund did not intend to wait idly for his father to return, but planned to continue in the expansion of territory under the Hauteville control. He decided not to move from Epirus through the recently captured Kastoria (which, nevertheless, became the starting point of his offensive)<sup>430</sup> toward Thessalonica, but turned his attention to the remaining territory of the province of Nikopolis with its capital in Joannina.<sup>431</sup> Although this deviation from the main objective of the entire campaign looks fairly surprising at first glance, it becomes understandable after a closer examination. It is very likely that the advance toward the second largest city of the Byzantine empire and then toward Constantinople itself was to be led by Guiscard in person, and no one else. However, the above-mentioned events in Italy were given a higher priority, so the Norman duke postponed the progress toward Thessalonica and Constantinople until his swift return, as he hoped.<sup>432</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, Bohemund did not have much experience as a commander yet, as his long and rich military career had only started.

<sup>427</sup> *Gesta*, 232; *Historia Sicula*, 772; *Alexias*, V.3.6. (p. 148); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 17; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 168; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 449; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 130.

<sup>428</sup> *Historia Sicula*, 772.

<sup>429</sup> *Gesta*, 232, 236; Malaterra, 586; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 133; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219; Böhm, "Kastoria," 13.

<sup>430</sup> Böhm, "Kastoria," 14.

<sup>431</sup> Glavínas, "Καστοριά," 1258; Chalandon, *Essai*, 85; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 150.

<sup>432</sup> Guiscard strongly believed that his absence from the Balkan battlefield would be very short because before his departure he solemnly swore on the soul of his father Tankred that he would not cut his beard or hair or bathe until he sets his feet on the soil of Epirus again and resumes his campaign against the Byzantines. Orderic Vitalis, 20, 22; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 133. Events eventually developed a little differently, see text below.

Therefore, his father instructed him to maintain, or carefully expand, the areas under the Norman control and, in particular, to spare the military forces at his disposal as much as possible. Bohemund was not to risk an open battle or engage in hostilities, unless the Byzantines attacked first.<sup>433</sup> With these instructions in mind, the attack on the still unoccupied parts of the province of Nikopolis appeared to be the best logical choice. It was the last foothold of the Byzantine power west of the Pindos mountains, and if Bohemund had not seized it, it could later serve Alexios Komnenos as a suitable base for a counterattack against the Norman-controlled territories. At the same time, it was a fertile area,<sup>434</sup> and its occupation would certainly improve the supply situation of the Normans in the upcoming year.

The Norman host, reinforced by an unknown number of Byzantine troops from the conquered Epirotic mainland, as well as from the surroundings of Kastoria,<sup>435</sup> moved in late April 1082 from the latter location toward today's Korçë and from there southward along the western foothills of the Grammos mountains through today's Konitsa and Kalpakion to Joannina.<sup>436</sup> In the course of the march, Bohemund's forces were joined by local Byzantine garrisons and their commanders.<sup>437</sup> Apparently, thanks to their knowledge of the local terrain, Bohemund had no difficulty finding the fastest way through this mountainous and rugged part of Epirus, located on both sides of today's Albanian-Greek border.<sup>438</sup> Inhabitants of Joannina opened the gates to the incoming Normans without delay.<sup>439</sup> Bohemund then placed his soldiers in and around the city and began preparations for the expected Byzantine counterattack. Having inspected the

<sup>433</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 20: "*Interea uos prudenter in hac prouincia requiescite et inter hostes undique circumspecti estote. Si quis presumpserit bello uos impetere in uirtute Dei uiriliter resistite. Vos tamen caute ne bellare incipiatis nec occasionem preliandi hostibus detis neque indigenas quousque regressus fuero contra uos lacessatis.*" Chalandon, *Essai*, 85; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 17–18; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 168.

<sup>434</sup> See Idrisi, *La première géographie de l'Occident*, Présentation, notes, index, chronologie et bibliographie par Henri Bresc et Annliese Nef (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 406.

<sup>435</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.1. (p. 149); Malaterra, 585; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 169. See also text below.

<sup>436</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 169; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 57; Böhm, "Kastoria," 14. This region was referred to as *Bagenetia* in the Byzantine period. See *Alexias*, V.4.1. (p. 149).

<sup>437</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.1. (p. 149); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 169.

<sup>438</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 169.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 57.

city walls and the acropolis built in the tenth century, he was not satisfied with their condition, so he had them quickly repaired and surrounded from the outside with a moat. The whole fortification was further strengthened by erecting a second citadel.<sup>440</sup> In the meantime, the Normans also carried out raids to the adjacent area to plunder and collect supplies.<sup>441</sup>

Meanwhile in Constantinople, Alexios Komnenos was experiencing one of the most critical periods of his short reign. He lost a very important battle against the Normans and was personally responsible for considerable losses in the ranks of his army. In its heyday, even such heavy losses would probably mean no significant disruption of the defensive capacity of the Byzantine empire. However, due to the aforementioned financial crisis, Alexios Komnenos could not resort to the simplest and least time-consuming solution—to hire new mercenaries.<sup>442</sup> Troops which survived the battle of Dyrrachion had to be replenished from domestic sources. The cavalry needed fresh mounts and new recruits capable of fighting from horseback. Likewise, the infantry was in desperate need of new soldiers trained in sword fighting, spear throwing, or bow shooting. Yet, training in various military skills required considerable funding and, in particular, time. According to Anna Komnene, her father set to these activities to restore the combat ability of the defeated troops vigorously,<sup>443</sup> but the rapid improvement was hampered by the fact that the state finances were fully exhausted.<sup>444</sup> Therefore, Alexios Komnenos sought to raise the necessary funds for the army in various ways; for example, he confiscated the assets of his political opponents,<sup>445</sup> required “voluntary” donations from members of the high Byzantine aristocracy, including his own family relatives,<sup>446</sup> and, finally, engaged in the expropriation of unused liturgical vessels, mainly from numerous churches in the Byzantine capital.<sup>447</sup> The

<sup>440</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.1. (p. 149); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 57; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 469; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 169–170.

<sup>441</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.1. (p. 149); Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 58.

<sup>442</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142); Chalandon, *Essai*, 80.

<sup>443</sup> *Alexias*, V.3.1. (p. 146).

<sup>444</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142–143): “τὸ δὲ ἄτερ χρημάτων οὐκ ἐνήν.”

<sup>445</sup> Of course, the first “victims” of these measures immediately after Alexios Komnenos’ ascension to the throne were the supporters of the former emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates. See Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 361.

<sup>446</sup> *Alexias*, V.2.1. (p. 143); Chalandon, *Essai*, 80.

<sup>447</sup> *Alexias*, V.2.2. (p. 144); Chalandon, *Essai*, 80; M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni 1081–1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 46; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 361.

emperor, with the help and support of his mother Anna Dalassene,<sup>448</sup> older brother *sebastokratorōn*<sup>449</sup> Isaakios Komnenos, and the patriarch of Constantinople Eustathios Garidas (1081–1084), made a tremendous effort to win over the high church hierarchy at the ecclesiastic synod convened in Constantinople specifically for this purpose.<sup>450</sup> Nevertheless, this last controversial step elicited harsh criticism of Alexios Komnenos and his regime throughout the orthodox church, with Leo, the metropolitan of Chalkedon, as the leader of the opposition.<sup>451</sup>

Therefore, it is no wonder that when the Norman host, led by Guiscard and later by Bohemund, captured Kastoria and Joannina, respectively, thus expanding substantially the territories of the Byzantine realm under Norman control, immediate military response of Alexios Komnenos was

<sup>448</sup>The emperor's mother, Anna Dalassene, held the title of the regent since August 1081. See *Alexias*, III.6.5.–7. (p. 101–102); Mamangákis, “Δαλασσηνή,” 170; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 21.

<sup>449</sup>For this Byzantine senior court title created by Alexios Komnenos in 1081 exclusively for his older brother Isaakios, see *Alexias*, III.4.1. (p. 95); Lucien Stiernon, “Notes de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines. Sébaste et gambros,” *REB* 23 (1965): 227. See also note 388.

<sup>450</sup>*Alexias*, V.2.3. (p. 144); Savvídīs, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 54. This synod took place at the turn of 1081 and 1082, immediately after Alexios Komnenos' return from the Balkan battlefield. Glavínas, *Ἡ ἐπὶ Ἀλεξίου Κομνηνοῦ (1081–1118) περὶ ἱερῶν σκευῶν, κειμήλιων καὶ ἀγίων εἰκόνων ἔρις (1081–1095)* (Thessalonica, 1972), 54.

<sup>451</sup>*Alexias*, V.2.6. (p. 145–146); Glavínas, *Ἔρις*, 65ff. The resistance of part of the church hierarchy was to some extent based on the way Alexios Komnenos seized the reign in April 1081, when soldiers under his command occupied Constantinople and plundered it for three days, including church institutions and property. For this reason, Alexios Komnenos had to submit to the public acts of penitence for a period of forty days. However, for some representatives of the orthodox church, this did not suffice, and as a result, an unpleasant after-taste resonated in the ecclesiastical circles for at least another decade, de facto until the Blachernae synod at the end of 1094. Glavínas, *Ἔρις*, 67–68; Angold, *Church*, 46; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 361–362; Geórgios Charizánis, “Ὁ μητροπολίτης Κερκύρας Νικόλαος καὶ ἡ βυζαντινο-νορμανδικὴ σύγκρουση στο Ἴόνιο (τέλη του 11<sup>ου</sup> αι.),” *Ῥυζαντιακά* 24 (2004): 202. See also text below.

essentially zero.<sup>452</sup> This was also the reason why the aforementioned Byzantine fortresses, along with their surroundings, preferred to surrender to the Normans without even a token of opposition. If their commanders decided to resist, no one would come to rescue them. However, the latest news of the loss of Joannina forced Alexios Komnenos to act. In May 1082, he quickly set out from Constantinople<sup>453</sup> and via Thessalonica and further upstream of the Haliakmon river and through today's Metsovo

<sup>452</sup> In this situation, the Byzantine emperor could only resort to purely diplomatic activities and gestures, with the help of which he intended to strengthen the determination of his allies to fight. A typical and most well known in this regard is the example of the Venetians, to whom Alexios Komnenos in May 1082 (i.e., just before he set off to fight Bohemund) confirmed privileges which he had promised already in the summer of 1081 (under which, e.g., the Venetian doge received a senior court title of *prōtosebastos*) and issued the famous golden bull for this purpose (*chrysoboullos logos*). Dölger, *Regesten*, 27–28, no. 1081; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 170–171. For the privileges and dating issues of this document (there is a disagreement on the traditional dating of the golden bull to May 1082), see, for example, Oldřich Tůma, “The Dating of Alexius’s Chrysobull to the Venetians: 1082, 1084 or 1092?” *BSI* 42 (1981): 171–185; Thomas F. Madden, “The Chrysobull of Alexius I Komnenus to the Venetians: The Date and the Debate,” *Journal of medieval History* 28, no. 1 (2002): 23–41; David Jacoby, “The Chrysobull of Alexius I Komnenus to the Venetians: The Date and the Debate,” *Journal of medieval History* 28, no. 2 (2002): 199–204; Peter Frankopan, “Byzantine Trade Privileges to Venice in the Eleventh Century: The Chrysobull of 1092,” *Journal of medieval History* 30 (2004): 135–160, and most recently also Howard-Johnston, “Reading,” 486–487. The text of the golden bull was partly preserved in the work of Anna Komnene, although the Byzantine princess mentions it in connection with the events of 1084 and not 1082. *Alexias*, VI.6.10. (p. 178–179).

<sup>453</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.2. (p. 149); Stephenson, *Frontier*, 171; Kisliger, “Notizen,” 134. At this point, it should be noted that, in addition to trying to raise funds to restore the army’s combat capabilities and prepare for a new campaign against Bohemund, Alexios Komnenos was fully involved in the trial held against the heretical doctrine of John Italos and his pupils from 13 March (or 20 March) to 11 April 1082, and participated in another synod convened for this purpose. Jean Gouillard, “Le synodikon sous les Comnènes,” *TM* 2 (1967): 123; Jean Gouillard, “Le procès officiel de Jean l’Italien. Les actes et leurs sous-entendus,” *TM* 9 (1985): 135; Glavinas, “Ἐπις,” 70; Angold, *Church*, 50–54. It was another attempt of the emperor to win over the hostile part of the senior church hierarchy, discontented with the previous expropriation of church property. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 364. The importance of the whole matter to Alexios Komnenos’ position of power is underlined by the fact that until the whole trial was over, the emperor could not set off with his troops from Constantinople against Bohemund. Furthermore, it should be noted that Anna Komnene places her description of the whole trial against John Italos only after her father’s victory over Bohemund in the battle of Larissa in the summer of 1083, which represents another chronological misplacement in her historical work. See *Alexias*, V.8.1.ff (p. 161–167); Howard-Johnston, “Alexiad,” 295.

pass apparently arrived near Joannina at the end of the month.<sup>454</sup> Unfortunately, no direct reports on the size and composition of the Byzantine forces under his command are preserved, except for a general statement of the Byzantine princess that Alexios Komnenos “gathered all his forces.”<sup>455</sup> What can certainly be assumed is that due to the situation described above, the replacement of losses in the previous year had not been completed by May 1082, and the same applies to the units assembled in Thessalonica in the spring of 1082,<sup>456</sup> where this process was certainly overseen by *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos. Logically, it can be stated that Alexios Komnenos led significantly fewer men against Bohemund in May 1082 than against his father at Dyrrachion in October 1081.

Troops which suffered the most significant losses in the battle of Dyrrachion were temporarily or completely missing in the Byzantine battle order. In particular, this appears to apply to the Varangian guard, whose remaining men were left in Constantinople, as well as the survivors of the units of the *Bestiaritai* and the *Exkoubitai*. In the case of divisions from the provinces of Hellas and Boulgaria, the situation in the spring of 1082 was the same as before—these *tagmata* continued to be needed in their home provinces and could not be redeployed against the Normans. Similarly, the units of the *Chōmatēnoi* and the *Athanatoi* had to stay in Asia Minor and ensure the defense of these territories against the Seljuks. The Paulikians, headed by Xanthas and Kouleon, refused to take part in the next fight despite repeated imperial calls.<sup>457</sup> Alexios Komnenos was able to set out from Constantinople in May 1082 at the head of a mixture of hastily recruited mercenaries and soldiers belonging to his personal entourage,<sup>458</sup> reinforced by armed retainers of other members of the imperial family or high Byzantine aristocracy.<sup>459</sup> This much reduced core of the Byzantine army (approximately 2500 men) was then en route joined by the Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata* and by the Thessalian *tagma*

<sup>454</sup> Kisliger, “Notizen,” 134; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18.

<sup>455</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.2. (p. 149): “τὰς δυνάμεις ἀπάσας συναγαγὼν”; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 170.

<sup>456</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142); Chalandon, *Essai*, 81.

<sup>457</sup> *Alexias*, V.3.2. (p. 146).

<sup>458</sup> During the second battle against Bohemund, Anna Komnene mentions Alexios’ personal guards as well as his servant named Goules, originally from Kappadokia in Asia Minor, who had already served his father. *Alexias*, V.4.8. (p. 152). For servant Goules, see also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 109.

<sup>459</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 127.

supplemented with new hurriedly trained levies without previous military experience<sup>460</sup> and possibly a unit of the Vardariot Turks.<sup>461</sup> The total numerical strength of those units apparently did not exceed 6000 or 7000 men.<sup>462</sup> With an optimistic estimate, it can be assumed that Alexios Komnenos led about 9000–10,000 men in total to fight Bohemund now based in Joannina, which was only a smaller half of forces he had had at his disposal before the battle of Dyrrachion. Moreover, this ad hoc collected army with a high proportion of poorly trained recruits lacked not only the protective shield wall of the highly motivated and heavily armed Varangian guard, but also the more numerous heavy cavalry.<sup>463</sup>

It seems that the Norman host under Bohemund's command, left behind by his father to fight the Byzantines, apparently slightly outnumbered Alexios Komnenos' forces for the first time during the war.<sup>464</sup> However, it should be remembered that also the Normans suffered losses in the battle of Dyrrachion and that the number of soldiers available for combat operations decreased due to non-combat losses caused by the harsh Epirotic winter. Next, the reduction in numbers was also caused by frequent desertions<sup>465</sup> and, in particular, the need to set aside a certain number of men for garrisons in the controlled areas.<sup>466</sup> In addition to infantry, such garrisons had to include at least a few dozen knights or heavy cavalrymen, even of inferior quality, so that Norman occupational forces could quickly react to any sign of local resistance. For example, a sufficiently strong garrison had to stay in Dyrrachion, and the same applies to other key locations such as Kastoria, Aulon, Butrint, and Korfu. It can be assumed that by that time the number of 1300 knights who formed the core of the Norman host at the beginning of the campaign was reduced to around 700.<sup>467</sup> In direct proportion to this, the total strength of the Norman battle-ready units would then fall to around 8000 men. It is

<sup>460</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142).

<sup>461</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 87.

<sup>462</sup> The estimate is based on the above numbers of units in October 1081, that is, at the time of the battle of Dyrrachion, taking into account the possible losses. See text above.

<sup>463</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 170.

<sup>464</sup> Of course, Anna Komnene states that the Norman host by far outnumbered the Byzantine troops. See *Alexias*, V.4.2. (p. 149). Theotokis also argues for the numerical superiority of the Norman forces. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 170.

<sup>465</sup> See text above.

<sup>466</sup> Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 177.

<sup>467</sup> Romualdus, 174.

questionable how much Guiscard managed to replace the losses over the winter by hiring more mercenaries,<sup>468</sup> as the possibilities of maritime communications with Apulian towns were severely, if not entirely, restricted due to bad weather. In any case, the ranks of the Norman host were bolstered by local Byzantine troops, probably made up of the Vlachs and the Slavs, who voluntarily joined the Normans after they captured Dyrrachion, Kastoria, and Joannina.<sup>469</sup> In the end, the total number of warriors under Bohemund's command could reach up to 11,000 men. The main advantage Bohemund enjoyed in the upcoming conflict, besides slightly outnumbering the Byzantine forces, was that he had a well-trained heavy cavalry at his disposal.

Just as the sources are meager in information on the size and composition of both armies at the end of May 1082, similarly sketchy and little detailed is the description of the battle of Joannina itself. We do not know the exact date, location, or the course of the battle. Anna Komnene's most completely preserved description focuses only on a few key moments unsurprisingly related to actions of her father.<sup>470</sup> The account penned by William of Apulia is even more terse and, moreover, seems to contain information relating to a completely different engagement.<sup>471</sup> Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the two hosts met east of Joannina, close to the eastern shore of Lake Joannina. A road from the Metsovo pass ran through this location, possibly bringing Alexios Komnenos at the head of the imperial force to the city of Joannina from this direction. The emperor probably did not approach Joannina directly, but halted his forces somewhere nearby, set up a camp, and then set out to seek the location of the future engagement in person.<sup>472</sup> Emperor's plan was to lure Bohemund to this very place by sending small groups of cavalymen to provoke

<sup>468</sup> According to Anna Komnene, this is exactly what Guiscard intended to do during the winter months. *Alexias*, V.1.2. (p. 141).

<sup>469</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.1. (p. 149); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18. For the question of ethnicity, see the text above as well as Böhm, "Kastoria," 13.

<sup>470</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.2. ff (p. 149–151).

<sup>471</sup> For example, in addition to wooden wagons used by the Byzantines to block direct access to their battle formation, William of Apulia also mentions the use of caltrops, which Anna Komnene refers to only in connection with the next Byzantine-Norman engagement. *Gesta*, 236. See text below.

<sup>472</sup> The fact that the battle did not take place directly in sight of Joannina, but at some distance, is confirmed by William of Apulia. *Gesta*, 236: "*Haud procul a Ianina (...) partis Alexine populus sua castra locarat.*"



skirmishes.<sup>473</sup> The less experienced and more impulsive Bohemund eventually moved with the entire Norman host and met the Byzantines where the emperor was waiting for him. Alexios Komnenos sought to make the most of the site's advantages, as well as put into practice a new defensive measure which was intended to save his units from the devastating onslaught by Norman knight cavalry. This measure was represented by light wooden wagons (each with four spears attached with their tips toward the enemy), which were deployed in a continuous line in front of the entire Byzantine battle formation before the outbreak of the battle. Their role was to block or at least break up the Norman cavalry charge and force the Norman knights to retreat.<sup>474</sup> Infantrymen were to push these wagons toward the Normans, driving them to the shore of the lake, where they would become an easy prey for the concentrated Byzantine archers.<sup>475</sup>

But Bohemund (or arguably the much more experienced *comestabulus* of Brienne) refused to play into Alexios Komnenos' hands. As soon as the two hosts made contact early in the morning, and the Normans saw an unexpected obstacle formed by the wooden wagons, the Norman heavy cavalry quickly regrouped. Instead of the center of the Byzantine formation, the strike was directed against the Byzantine flanks,<sup>476</sup> where, similarly to the battle of Dyrrachion, *tagmata* from Makedonia and Thrace and from Thessaly were probably deployed. The Byzantine flanks made up of infantry and light cavalry could not withstand the Norman onslaught from an unexpected direction and were routed. Subsequently, the Normans surrounded the Byzantine center, where the emperor himself was located, and, as in the battle of Dyrrachion, began to attack it repeatedly until the Byzantine battle formation disintegrated completely.<sup>477</sup> If we are to believe the account of Anna Komnene, Alexios Komnenos, with a handful of loyal servants and his bodyguard, relentlessly deflected all these

<sup>473</sup> Another reason for sending small groups of Byzantine cavalry to attack the Normans was to perform reconnaissance and more accurately estimate the size of enemy forces. *Alexias*, V.4.2. (p. 149–150); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 170.

<sup>474</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.3. (p. 150); *Gesta*, 236; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 470; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 170. See also a detailed analysis of this original solution and its possible historical analogies in Theocharis Alexoupoúlos, "Using Ancient Military Handbooks to fight Medieval Battles: two Stratagems used by Alexios I Comnenos against the Normans and the Pechenegs," *Ἐῶνα καὶ ἑσπερία* 8 (2008–2012): 50–57, 61–62.

<sup>475</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.3. (p. 150).

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*; Chalandon, *Essai*, 86; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 470; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 170.

<sup>477</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.3. (p. 150).

attacks, dealing many a deadly blow and at the end of the battle made another heroic retreat from the battlefield.<sup>478</sup> However, contrary to the Byzantine princess' claim, her father did not head to Ochrid,<sup>479</sup> but probably returned to Thessalonica, where he tried to replenish his defeated troops with new levies and mercenaries as best as he could.<sup>480</sup>

The Byzantine emperor did not pull back even now, but, given the situation, he probably did not have a choice. After some time, the relentless Bohemund seems to have set off in the footsteps of the retreating Byzantine troops toward Thessalonica. This situation subsequently led to a new engagement, of which we have even less information than about the battle of Joannina, so that some researchers, based on preserved reports from written sources, quite rightly doubt whether the second battle described by Anna Komnene actually took place.<sup>481</sup> Nor the location of this supposed encounter is known, but most scholars argue that it was again in Epirus, this time south of Joannina near the town of Arta.<sup>482</sup> However, this assumption is highly unlikely, especially if geographical and temporal factors are taken into consideration. Moving the Byzantine army from Joannina (and eventually all the way to Ochrid, then back past Kastoria occupied by the Normans) to Thessalonica, and from there again over the Metsovo pass within the sight of Norman-occupied Joannina to Arta, is

<sup>478</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.4. (p. 150–151); Tavian Carozzi, *Terreur*, 470.

<sup>479</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.4. (p. 151). See also text below.

<sup>480</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.4. (p. 151); *Alexias*, V.2.3. (p. 170–171). The emperor's return to Thessalonica is also confirmed by William of Apulia. *Gesta*, 236.

<sup>481</sup> The second battle, which reportedly took place near Arta, is known only from a brief description of Anna Komnene and even briefer from that of Malaterra. *Alexias*, V.4.5. (p. 151–152); Malaterra, 588. Other Norman chroniclers from southern Italy, William of Apulia and Romualdo of Salerno, claim that Bohemund fought only two battles against Alexios Komnenos—the battle of Joannina and then the battle of Larissa. *Gesta*, 236; Romualdus, 175. Lupus Protospatharius is interested in events taking place in Italy at the time and does not comment on Bohemund's campaign in Epirus. Temporally and geographically even more distant work of William of Malmesbury contains only a terse allusion to Bohemund's bravery in the fight against the Byzantines. Finally, Orderic Vitalis seems to describe Bohemund's involvement in the battle of Larissa. See Orderic Vitalis, 28.

<sup>482</sup> Anna Komnene does not name the site of the new battle. *Alexias*, V.4.5. ff. (p. 151–152). William of Apulia describes only the first battle of Joannina, although apparently with mixed details from the second encounter. *Gesta*, 236. Out of the contemporary chroniclers, it is only Malaterra who refers to Arta as the place of this battle. Malaterra, 588. For scholars placing this second battle to Arta on the basis of Malaterra's reference, see Chalandon, *Essai*, 87; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 18; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 58; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 150; Tavian Carozzi, *Terreur*, 471; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 171.

not only illogical in itself, but would also require a disproportionate amount of time. For these reasons, it is more likely that the new armed encounter did not take place near Arta, but at the turn of June and July 1082 somewhere in western Makedonia (perhaps between the present-day towns of Grevena and Kozani).<sup>483</sup> This time, instead of a line of wooden wagons, Alexios Komnenos intended to use iron caltrops (*triboloi*), which he had deployed the evening before the battle in front of the Byzantine formation.<sup>484</sup> However, the Normans somehow guessed the emperor's plan and directed their irresistible cavalry charge not against the center where the caltrops were arranged, but again against the flanks.<sup>485</sup> Byzantine soldiers were quickly routed as before. Only the emperor with his few loyal followers continued to resist and in face of utmost danger even dared to mock his pursuers.

After repeated painful defeats of the Byzantine field army in 1082, Alexios Komnenos realized that it is impossible to face the onslaught of the Norman knight cavalry in direct combat with the forces he had at his disposal. For the rest of the year, the Byzantines thus focused on the static defense of fortified strongholds located on key roads throughout the Balkans. It is very likely that Alexios Komnenos entrusted the overall command over defensive operations to *meGas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos<sup>486</sup> and by early August 1082<sup>487</sup> returned to Constantinople,

<sup>483</sup> Kislinger, "Notizen," 135. Birkenmeier even locates the place of this second battle as far as the Vardar river valley, which is too far east and therefore unlikely. See Birkenmeier, *Army*, 67.

<sup>484</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.5. (p. 151); Yewdale, *Bobemond*, 18; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 171. For the overall history of deploying this defensive weapon, see Mamuka Tsurtsunia, "Τρίβολος: a Byzantine Landmine," *Byzantion* 82 (2012): 415–422.

<sup>485</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.6. (p. 151–152); Malaterra, 588; Chalandon, *Essai*, 87; Yewdale, *Bobemond*, 18; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 171. According to the description of William of Apulia, it can be assumed that the Norman attack from the unexpected direction was made possible by the dense fog that hid the movements of the Normans across the battlefield in plain sight of the Byzantines. *Gesta*, 236. Some scholars believe that foggy weather already helped the Normans in the first battle of Joannina. See, for example, Alexoupoúlos, "Handbooks," 53.

<sup>486</sup> *Alexias*, V.4.6. ff (p. 152–153).

<sup>487</sup> The end of July and the beginning of August 1082 is the latest possible moment for the emperor's return, since in August 1082 Alexios Komnenos issued the golden bull (*chryso-boullas logos*) in Constantinople, condemning his own previous measures for the expropriation of church liturgical vessels. Glavinas, *Ἐπις*, 74; Dölger, *Regesten*, 29–30, no. 1085. For questions on the dating of the bull, see the text and note 516.

where he remained at least until the end of February 1083.<sup>488</sup> He spent these six months (or more) focusing on two main activities—looking for new possible allies against the Normans by means of active diplomacy and pooling vital funds to strengthen the combat-depleted and weakened Byzantine army for the upcoming war year.<sup>489</sup> Meanwhile, the Normans, led by Bohemund, took the initiative and proceeded to further expand the territories under their control. After securing the southern flank with the center in Joannina, the Norman activities in late June 1082 logically turned to the areas north of the city of Ochrid and lake of the same name. Unspecified Norman units, commanded by knights Peter of Aulps and Pounteses (Raoul of Pontoise), occupied the whole territory up to Skopje with relative ease. After taking over the Byzantine strongholds in the Poloboi (Polog) region<sup>490</sup> and Skopje itself,<sup>491</sup> they became the masters of the center of the province (*doukato*) of Boulgaria.<sup>492</sup> Encouraged by this effortless success, Bohemund, with the most battle-worthy units of his host, then decided to risk a new push further east along the Via *Egnatia*.

<sup>488</sup> This assumption is based on the fact that by the end of February, Anna Komnene had to be conceived, as she was born on Saturday 2 December 1083 as the first child to her imperial parents. For Anna's date of birth, see *Alexias*, V.4.8. (p. 184); Peter Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, CFHB. Teil 1, Einleitung und Text (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975), 55: “μηνὶ δεκεμβρίῳ β', ἡμέρᾳ ἑβδόμῃ, ὥρα ἑνάτῃ, ἰνδικτιῶνος ἑβδόμης, ἐγεννήθη ἡ πορφυρογέννητος κυρὰ Ἄννα.”; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 140.

<sup>489</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.2. (p. 154). See text below.

<sup>490</sup> From now on, this area was defended by Norman troops led by Peter of Aulps, who was therefore no longer involved in further military operations. *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Chalandon, *Essai*, 87; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 150; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172. Upper Poloboi and lower Poloboi are areas in the southern and northern parts of the Polog mountain valley respectively, lying on the upper course of the Vardar river. See Kravari, *Macédoine*, 30, 179.

<sup>491</sup> Skopje was subdued by the troops headed by Pounteses (Raoul of Pontoise). *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Chalandon, *Essai*, 87; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 150; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172. The city has existed since the ancient times when it was called *Scupi*. In the Byzantine period, its name was *Skopia*. After the earthquake of 518, it moved to its current position on the left bank of the Vardar river. Since the sixth century, it was defended by a fortification with a citadel. During the tenth century, Skopje became part of the Bulgarian empire but in 1002 was reconquered by the Byzantines. After 1018, it became the seat of the military commander of the province (*doukato*) of Boulgaria, and during the eleventh century its fortification underwent a total reconstruction. Kravari, *Macédoine*, 160–163. For the province of Boulgaria, see Kühn, *Armee*, 227–228; Krsmanović, *Province*, 192–194.

<sup>492</sup> Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 280; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 135; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172.

However, the city of Ochrid, the defense of which was entrusted to Ariebes,<sup>493</sup> as well as the towns or *kastra* of Ostrobos,<sup>494</sup> Soskos,<sup>495</sup> Serbia,<sup>496</sup> Berroia,<sup>497</sup> and Vodena (Edessa) were stoutly defended by their garrisons.<sup>498</sup> Although the Norman host plundered the surroundings of these areas during its advance, the military significance of such actions was minimal, as these fortresses, together with the central section of the Via *Egnatia*, remained firmly in the Byzantine hands. Bohemund's deep inroad into the Makedonian territory was eventually brought to halt at the site called Asprai Ekklesiai in the Vardar valley, where the Normans remained in almost complete inactivity for next three months.<sup>499</sup> The momentum of the Norman attack seems to have finally run out, reaching

<sup>493</sup>For Ariebes and his Armenian ethnical background, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 28–29. However, Bohemund's impulsiveness does not fully explain why he decided to launch a direct attack on Ochrid, which his father had not risked a few months earlier and rather turned his attention to Kastoria. Bohemund had to be lured by the secret message of some inhabitants of Ochrid (presumably Slavs or Bulgarians), who told him that upon his arrival they would open the gates to the Normans. However, the Byzantine commander was able to come to terms with this dangerous situation and defend Ochrid. *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Böhm, "Kastoria," 14.

<sup>494</sup>The unsuccessful attack on the fortress appears to have deterred Bohemund from the intention to continue to Vodena directly along the Via *Egnatia*, as he turned southward so as to reach Vodena by a detour via Soskos, Serbia, and Berroia. In fact, Bohemund imitated the tactics of his father who, instead of directly attacking Ochrid, bypassed this city and took Kastoria a year ago.

<sup>495</sup>The location of this fortress is not clear to this day, but apparently it did not lie directly on the Via *Egnatia*, but more to the south in the area between Kastoria and Berroia. Kravari, *Macédoine*, 332–333. See also Stephenson, *Frontier*, 68.

<sup>496</sup>Today's Serbia located southeast of the town of Kozani.

<sup>497</sup>Today's town of Veria. For more detailed information, see Kravari, *Macédoine*, s. 63–67.

<sup>498</sup>*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 172; Kravari, *Macédoine*, 38. Conversely, Chalandon mistakenly believes that the Normans were able to conquer all the fortresses except for Ochrid and Ostrobos. Chalandon, *Essai*, 87. Theotokis argues that the Normans plundered these fortresses and towns. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172.

<sup>499</sup>*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Chalandon, *Essai*, 87; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 280; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 150; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 59; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172. The location of this site is unknown, but the context indicates that it had to lie somewhere near the Vardar river on the Via *Egnatia*.

its utmost limit.<sup>500</sup> In order to keep his forces busy, Bohemund had the neglected Byzantine fortress in Moglena restored, for which he set aside a small garrison led by a certain Sarakenos.<sup>501</sup> Then, due to the worsening weather conditions and the upcoming winter, as well as the declining morale among his commanders,<sup>502</sup> Bohemund decided in mid-September

<sup>500</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19. As this place is in the immediate vicinity of Thessalonica, it is reasonable to assume that the Norman progress was successfully blocked by the local Byzantine troops, which had retreated there after both lost battles in the late spring of 1082, in particular, the Thessalian *tagma* and Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata* under the command of Gregorios Pakourianos. Kislinger, “Notizen,” 136. Because of the Norman need to create and set aside garrisons on the occupied territory and without the possibility of fresh reinforcements, Bohemund could no longer have enough forces to plan an attack against such a populous and solidly fortified city as Thessalonica—the second largest city of the Byzantine Empire.

<sup>501</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19. Moglena (*ta Moglena*) is a mountain valley stretching along the southern slopes of the Voras mountains. This valley is drained by the Moglenitsas river, a left-hand tributary of the Haliakmon. There was also an eponymous fortress, believed to be located about one kilometer north-northwest of today’s site of Chrysi at the confluence of the Belitsa and Moglenitsas rivers, or circa two kilometers from Aridaia, today’s administrative center of the whole valley. Moglena fortress was conquered and plundered in 1015 by the emperor Basileios II, who also had its walls torn down. See Kravari, *Macédoine*, 82–83. It was apparently refortified by the Normans and was to become an advance support and supply point for their progress to Thessalonica.

<sup>502</sup> The strenuous military operations in the rugged mountainous terrain of western Makedonia, without visible military contribution and without the possibility of obtaining rich booty, seem to have upset several Bohemund’s commanders so much that they organized a conspiracy against him, with the aim to bring Bohemund down and end the entire campaign. The total military inaction lasting three months may also have played a role, as well as probable covert Byzantine intervention of unknown nature. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151. In relation to the conspiracy, Anna Komnene mentions three Norman “counts”—William, Rainald, and Raoul of Pontoise. However, Bohemund managed to uncover it and had William blinded on the spot and Rainald sent to southern Italy to be judged by Guiscard himself (who eventually had Rainald blinded, too). Only Pountesses/Raoul of Pontoise avoided punishment by defecting to the Byzantines before being arrested. *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Chalandon, *Essai*, 88; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 19; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 173. See also note 152. In the same year, the emperor granted him land near Thessalonica. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 363. The Norman occupation of Skopje did not last too long. Some scholars assume that Alexios Komnenos’ secret diplomatic activities may have been behind the conspiracy of the three commanders, as was the case a year later. See, for example, Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 59. This thesis seems highly unlikely, given the small number of conspirators and their lower social status, as well as the fact that Bohemund was able to uncover the plot and deal with it quite easily.

1082<sup>503</sup> that it was time to finally return along the southern route via Beroia and the present-day town of Kozani to Kastoria, where he presumably intended to spend winter with his troops.<sup>504</sup>

In the end, however, it was the Byzantines who had the penultimate word that year, namely *mezas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos, who from Thessalonica, most likely with the help of spies, closely monitored the movements of the enemy.<sup>505</sup> When the Norman host withdrew from the town of Asprai Ekklesiai to Kastoria, Pakourianos and his soldiers immediately captured the Moglena fortress with lightning speed. Its commander Sarakenos was executed, and the stronghold itself was razed to the ground.<sup>506</sup> Pakourianos' brave counteraction enraged the impulsive Bohemund so much that, despite the approaching winter, he decided to return to the area he had just left. However, the aim of his final advance against the Byzantines in 1082 was not to recapture Moglena but to seize the capital of the Byzantine Thessaly—Larissa. At the same time, another smaller detachment of knights sent by Bohemund north managed to

<sup>503</sup>At this point, the chronological sequence of events contained in this work begins to diverge from the otherwise very detailed analysis made by Kislinger, who puts Bohemund's return to Kastoria to the beginning or middle of November 1082 and the commencement of the siege of Larissa to 23 April 1083. Kislinger, "Notizen," 136. However, if the Normans began their offensive movement east immediately after the second defeat of the Byzantines at the end of June or early July 1082 (see text above), then by the end of July Bohemund's vanguard units would be able to reach Asprai Ekklesiai, where, according to Anna Komnene, they encamped for three months, meaning that they would stay there until the end of October. This creates a chronological problem because Bohemund had besieged Larissa already on 3 October 1082 (see text above), but as such it does not represent an insurmountable complication. There are two possible solutions. Either Anna Komnene somewhat exaggerated concerning the length of the stay of Norman host near Asprai Ekklesiai, or the period of three months indicated by her is correct, but the aforementioned second battle (conventionally referred to as the battle of Arta, the existence of which, in one way or another, is reasonably doubted, though) did not take place at all, and the Normans set off eastward in early or mid-June 1082 (a month earlier than assumed by Kislinger), immediately after the victory in the battle of Joannina at the end of May 1082. See text above.

<sup>504</sup>*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153). Bohemund ordered his host to return to Kastoria relatively early (given that autumn was just beginning). This was probably due to the aforementioned difficulties with subordinate commanders, as well as the loss of Skopje in the north. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151.

<sup>505</sup>Chalandon, *Essai*, 87–88.

<sup>506</sup>*Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Chalandon, *Essai*, 88; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 172; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 59.

occupy Pelagonia without a fight.<sup>507</sup> The main core of the Norman host led by Bohemund set out from Kastoria southward probably through today's towns of Siatista, Grevena, Kalambaka, and Trikala, which the Normans managed to capture, arrived in Thessaly and besieged Larissa on 3 October 1082.<sup>508</sup> On the way, a smaller Norman detachment seized in a sudden attack the fortress of Tzibiskos.<sup>509</sup> Obviously, Bohemund relied heavily on the moment of surprise and seemed to expect the fall of Larissa after a similarly brief siege as at the beginning of the year in the case of Kastoria and Joannina. It was exactly for this reason that he hoped that he would spend the winter in Larissa with his soldiers.<sup>510</sup> Bohemund also seemed to expect that, after the arrival of his troops, the Vlachs living around the city would join the Norman side.<sup>511</sup> However, none of these hopes materialized because the defenders of Larissa stoutly stood their ground, and the Vlachs refrained from taking any action. So, the Normans had to pitch their camp under the city walls perforce and began to prepare

<sup>507</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.2. (p. 154). Böhm interprets these actions as a sign that Bohemund had realized the limits of his advance and postponed the attack on Thessalonica indefinitely, or at least until his father's return with fresh reinforcements. See Böhm, "Kastoria," 15. Another motive for Bohemund's attack on Larissa was the expectation of a large and rich plunder, which could calm down the tensions among the rank-and-file soldiers. *Gesta*, 236: "Ad quam [Larissam] delatos thesauros imperiales, quamque opibus magnis [Buamundus] audiverat esse repletam."; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151. Larissa, located in the middle of a fertile plain, also represented a more pleasant place for soldiers to winter than Kastoria surrounded by high mountains and lakes. Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 35; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172.

<sup>508</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.2. (p. 154); Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 36; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151. For discussion on this date, see text above.

<sup>509</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.2. (p. 154); *Gesta*, 236; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 280; Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 36; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 59; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 172. This Byzantine *kastron*, which appears to have served mainly as a refuge for the surrounding population, was located on an elevation northeast of today's village of Grizanon. Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 279–280.

<sup>510</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.1. (p. 153); Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 1259; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 60.

<sup>511</sup> It is difficult to imagine Bohemund having more detailed information about the 1066 Vlach uprising. Perhaps, he was instructed by his father to make contact with Vlach leaders at any opportunity and/or was naturally urged to do so by some of the Vlachs, who seem to have joined the Norman host at the beginning of 1082. The timing was also very favorable, as by September all the Vlachs had already descended from summer pastures in the mountains (where they had shepherded their flocks since about April) and returned to their homes in and around Larissa. For the semi-nomadic way of life of the Vlachs, see Kekaumenos, 224; Litavrin, "Влахи," 148–149, 157; Fanis G. Dasoulas, "Οι μεσαιωνικές κοινωνίες των Βλάχων," *Valkanika symmeikta* 16 (2005–2014): 12.



for a prolonged winter siege.<sup>512</sup> The unusually high morale of the citizens of Larissa facing the enemy onslaught can be attributed in part to the fact that the defense of the city was entrusted to the Byzantine commander *bestarchēs* Leo Kefalas, who, through his father (who had served to Alexios' father), was closely linked to the emperor.<sup>513</sup>

Leo Kefalas not only embarked on the city defense vigorously, but also regularly sent reports to the emperor in Constantinople about the siege of Larissa and the enemy movements.<sup>514</sup> As mentioned above, Alexios Komnenos arrived in the capital of the Byzantine empire in August 1082 at the latest, and during his stay there he primarily strived to raise new financial resources to prepare the army for the upcoming war year. His urgent return to Constantinople was also hastened by the increased opposition of part of the church circles due to unpopular measures in relation to the expropriation of unused liturgical vessels adopted in the spring of 1082.<sup>515</sup> In this critical situation, Alexios Komnenos saw no solution other than to give in to the pressure of senior church leaders and release a golden bull (*chrysoboullōs logos*) in August 1082,<sup>516</sup> in which the emperor not only condemned his previous measure, but also prohibited its future

<sup>512</sup> Bohemund's firm intention of mounting a siege even under such conditions is evidenced by the deployment of siege engines. See *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 154).

<sup>513</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 154); Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 37. For the career of this Byzantine commander, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 176–178. Interestingly, Leo Kefalas actually became the commander of Larissa only a few months before the arrival of the Norman host and had previously resided in Constantinople. Perhaps, it is precisely this transfer to the province that is linked to the remission of all secondary taxes (*exkousseia*) except for the basic land tax (*telos*), which Alexios Komnenos imposed on his property near the village of Tandrina in the vicinity of Constantinople in 1082. See: Paul Lemerle—André Guillou—Nicolas Svoronos—Denise Papachryssanthou, *Actes de Lavra. Première partie: des origines à 1204*. Édition diplomatique. Texte. Archives de l'Atlios V, (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1970), 241–244; Bartusis, *Land*, 129.

<sup>514</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 154).

<sup>515</sup> Glavinas, "Ἔρις," 74. See text above.

<sup>516</sup> Venance Grumel, "L'affaire de Léon de Chalcédoine: Le chrysobulle d'Alexis I<sup>er</sup> sur les objets sacrés," *REB* 2 (1944): 127–131. See also Dölger, *Regesten*, 29–30, no. 1085; Gautier, "Diatribes," 8. Dating of the chrysobull to August 1082 is certain, as this date is explicitly stated in the body of the text. See Kōnstantinos N. Sáthas, *Λόγος χρυσόβουλλος τοῦ βασιλέως κῦρ Ἀλεξίου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ περὶ τῶν ἱερῶν, Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη Κ. Ν. Σάθα. Τόμος Ζ'* (Venice, 1894), 176: "κατὰ τὸν Αὐγούστον μῆνα τῆς ε' ἰωδικτιῶνος ἐν ἔτει,σφζ'." Glavinas shows unfounded skepticism in this regard when he rejects this date, claiming that the golden bull was not actually issued until a year later (August 1083). Glavinas, "Ἔρις," 77–80.

implementation not only to himself, but also to all his successors.<sup>517</sup> This certainly represented a very unpleasant complication with regard to the conduct of the war against the Normans, because the emperor thus had to sacrifice an important source of instantly available financial reserves. And so, as several times before, Alexios Komnenos had to resort to significantly less costly means—diplomacy. At the turn of 1082 and 1083 (shortly after the news of Bohemund’s siege of Larissa reached Constantinople), the emperor sent the future patriarch of Jerusalem Euthymios (1084) to Thessalonica to conduct peace talks with the Normans. The role of *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos was to lend all possible support to the hierarch.<sup>518</sup> However, these attempts bore no tangible results, as Bohemund did not dispatch any emissaries there and continued to besiege Larissa. The negotiations with the Seljuk sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş were more successful. Thanks to the new peace treaty, Alexios Komnenos managed to secure an allied contingent of 7000 Seljuks led by the commander Kamyres.<sup>519</sup> This meant a significant and very welcome reinforcement for the Byzantine army in the upcoming new round of hostilities.

The relatively extended stay in the Byzantine capital (from late August 1082 to the end of February 1083) allowed Alexios Komnenos to restructure the remains of the Byzantine army more thoroughly than in the previous year. The exact nature of this reorganization is unknown, but there is a number of new names emerging among the Byzantine commanders mentioned by Anna Komnene in connection with military operations in 1083, confirming, and to some extent indicating, the nature of the ongoing transformation. The supreme commanders of the imperial army that set off from Constantinople via Thessalonica at the earliest in late February 1083 to help the defenders of Larissa were *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos

<sup>517</sup> Sáthas, *Λόγος χρυσόβουλλος*, 175: “ἀυτῆ τε καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς μετ’ αὐτὴν χριστιανοῖς βασιλεῦσι (...) μηκέτι τολμηῆσαι ἄψασθαι ἱερῶν”; Glavínas, “Ἐρις, 76–77; Gautier, “Diatribes,” 8; Angold, *Church*, 47.

<sup>518</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, 30, no. 1087; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Glavínas, “Θεσσαλία,” 37; Glavínas, “Ἐρις, 81; Bünnemann, *Guiscard*, 151; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 173.

<sup>519</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.2. (p. 154); Chalandon, *Essai*, 89; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 20; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, II (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958), 148; Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 59; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 68; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 173.

and general Basileios Kourtikios, nicknamed Ioannakes.<sup>520</sup> Other commanders were, for example, *prōtostratōr* Michael Doukas,<sup>521</sup> *prōtosebastos* Adrianos Komnenos,<sup>522</sup> Georgios Pyrrhos,<sup>523</sup> Migidenos,<sup>524</sup> and Ouzas.<sup>525</sup>

<sup>520</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.7. (p. 156); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174. Basileios Kourtikios was a descendant of a Byzantine family of Armenian origin from Adrianoupolis (the Kourtikoi had resided in Asia Minor by the tenth century, see Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 228) and Georgios Palaiologos' cousin. By 1083, he had already had a relatively varied and successful military career. He participated in Bryennios' rebellion of 1077–1078 on the side of the rebels and after the amnesty of the emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates joined the services of Alexios Komnenos. During the war against the Normans, he seems to have taken part in the battles of Dyrrachion and Joannina, but Anna Komnene specifically names him first only in connection with the battle of Larissa. For further details of his life and career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 43–46. It is clear from the uncovered lead seals that he was at the peak of his career around 1100 when he was awarded the court title *prōtokouroupalatēs*. Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals 2*, 242–244. Four other lead seals are known from the sigillographic material (although already of Kourtikios as a private individual) found at the sites of Malevo, Silistra, Dulovo, Alfatar, and Fakia near Burgas in present-day Bulgaria, see Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals 3*, 639. See also text below.

<sup>521</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.1. (p. 159). Michael Doukas (born around 1061) was the eldest son of Andronikos Doukas, hence the older brother of the empress Eirene Doukaina and brother-in-law of Alexios Komnenos. He was also a brother-in-law of Georgios Palaiologos, who married his other sister Anna. By 1094, he was awarded the title of *sebastos* as a member of the closest imperial bloodkinship. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 202–205. Many of his lead seal have been uncovered, see Victoria Bulgakova, *Byzantinische Bleisiegel in Osteuropa. Die Funde auf dem Territorium Altrusslands* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 102–105; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals 2*, 141. For the title of *prōtostratōr*, see Rodolphe Guilland, “Etudes de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines: Le protostrator,” *REB* 7 (1949): 156–179.

<sup>522</sup> The presence of Alexios Komnenos' younger brother Adrianos is not mentioned by the Byzantine princess. However, his participation in the expedition is recorded by John Zonaras and William of Apulia. See Zonaras, 735–736; *Gesta*, 238. I believe that he actually took part in the expedition alongside his brother, making it his real baptism of fire. Since he was only about three years younger than Alexios (born in 1060), he was twenty-three years old at the time of the expedition. Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 114. See also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 5–8. As a member of the imperial family, he is also abundantly represented in the published sigillographic material. See, for example, Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria*, Vol. 1, *Byzantine Seals with Geographical Names* (Sofia: Agato, 2003), 79–80; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals 2*, 218–220.

<sup>523</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.2. (p. 158); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 105.

<sup>524</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.4. (p. 159). Migidenos was a low-born Byzantine commander who commanded an unspecified group of Turks in this expedition. See also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 212–213.

<sup>525</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.3. (p. 160); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 260–261; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, II, 228. This commander was of Turkish origin, in particular of the nomadic ethnicity of the Uzes.

The list of commanders is complemented by the aforementioned Seljuk leader named Kamyres. What is truly striking is the sudden and unexplained absence of *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos, who up to this point had taken active part in every combat encounter against the Normans and seemed to be irreplaceable for the Byzantine war effort.<sup>526</sup> Anna Komnene makes no comment on his highly mysterious “disappearance” nor does she specify the exact composition of the Byzantine army during this very important campaign. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that this expedition against the Normans was again attended by the Thessalian *tagma*,<sup>527</sup> Makedonian and Thracian *tagma/tagmata* (both infantry and cavalry),<sup>528</sup> as well as by a mixture of mercenaries of different origins and soldiers belonging to Alexios Komnenos’ personal guard and his relatives and members of the high Byzantine aristocracy (such as the aforementioned Adrianos Komnenos, Nikeforos Melissenos, Michael Doukas, and Basileios Kourtikios). The Byzantine army also seems to have included a strong light infantry unit armed with bows (*peltastai*),<sup>529</sup> then the Uzes,<sup>530</sup> and the Turks,<sup>531</sup> and finally, a 7000-strong detachment of the Seljuk Turks mentioned above. In total, the various units of the gathered Byzantine army probably did not exceed 15,000 men (circa 8000

<sup>526</sup>The only logical explanation for this peculiar absence is that Alexios Komnenos entrusted him with some other urgent matter of military nature which must have arisen unexpectedly and posed a serious threat to the Byzantine Empire itself. For a likely explanation, see text below in Chap. 5.

<sup>527</sup>The presence of this cavalry and infantry unit is indicated by the participation of Nikeforos Melissenos. Apparently, during this campaign, the infantry was temporarily subordinated to Michael Doukas’ command. See text below.

<sup>528</sup>The presence of these troops (or at least part of them) can be presumed by the participation of Basileios Kourtikios, who belonged to one of the leading Makedonian-Thracian families residing in the provincial capital Adrianoupolis. Otherwise, these units would be led by *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos. As in the case of the Thessalian troops, it is likely that the infantry part of this unit was temporarily transferred under the command of Michael Doukas.

<sup>529</sup>*Alexias*, V.6.2. (p. 158). This unit of *peltastai* was commanded by Georgios Pyrrhos. Unfortunately, it is not possible to accurately determine its size and composition.

<sup>530</sup>*Alexias*, V.7.2. (p. 159). Anna Komnene uses the archaic ethnonym of the Sarmatians (*Sauromatai*) for the Uzes throughout her historical work to refer to these nomadic peoples related to the Seljuk Turks. Their commander was very likely Ouzas. Birkenmeier mistakenly assumes that she referred to the Pechenegs or the Kumans. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 68.

<sup>531</sup>The commander of this mercenary unit, who apparently was not part of the allied Seljuk forces under Kamyres’ command, was Migidenos. *Alexias*, V.6.4. (p. 159).

Byzantines and 7000 allied Seljuks).<sup>532</sup> At first glance, this composition did not differ too much from the improvised assembly of the Byzantine army in the previous year.

Despite all this, the very brief and sketchy description by Anna Komnene gives the impression that Alexios Komnenos fully accepted the inability of the Byzantine troops to withstand the charge of the Norman knights in a classic pitched battle and decided to alter his entire *modus operandi* accordingly. In the upcoming campaign, the Byzantine field army was to avoid open combat at any cost as it would lead to another Byzantine debacle. Instead, it was supposed to fight the Normans by means of surprise ambushes, rapid hit-and-run strikes from unexpected directions, and feigned retreats to prevent Bohemund from taking advantage of his superior heavy cavalry.<sup>533</sup> The tactics thus defined actually imitated the warfare typical of the nomadic peoples of the steppe, that is, the Pechenegs, the Uzes, and the Seljuk Turks, with whom Alexios Komnenos had had the opportunity to get acquainted in detail at the beginning of his military career in Asia Minor and the Balkans.<sup>534</sup> The successful application of the new strategy was to be ensured by boosting the number of troops which were due to their equipment and armaments ideal for this way of fighting—the light cavalry and cavalry archers. Looking again at the Byzantine army described above, it is clear that although the composition of the units did not change much, the proportion of the light cavalry and especially of the cavalry archers within it increased significantly compared to

<sup>532</sup>The Byzantine army seems to have had numerical superiority over the Normans in the upcoming battle, as the overall strength of the Norman host under Bohemund's command remained approximately the same (ca. 11,000 men) or decreased slightly in comparison with the previous year. At the same time, however, it should be considered that the absence of *mezas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos may have meant that part of the Makedonian and Thracian units did not take part in the expedition and performed other assignments under his command. See more in the chapter on the war against the Pechenegs below. The assumption of the numerical advantage on the side of the Byzantines seems to be confirmed by William of Apulia. See *Gesta*, 236: “*Alexius urbis innumera cum gente venit.*”

<sup>533</sup>Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219.

<sup>534</sup>For nomadic combat tactics, see Denis Sinor, “The Inner Asian Warriors,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981): 133–144; Antony Karasulas and Angus McBride, *Mounted Archers of the Steppe 600 BC–AD 1300* (London: Osprey, 2004), 48–55. I briefly discussed the process of “nomadization” of the Byzantine army during Alexios Komnenos' reign in my recent article, see Marek Meško, “Nomad Influences in the Byzantine Army under Alexios I Komnenos (1081–95),” *War in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*, ed. by Georgios Theotokis and Marek Meško (Abingdon: Routledge 2021), 66–80.

the past. These units accounted for more than half of the total force (almost two-thirds). Since the Byzantines themselves no longer had the necessary number of such units at the end of the eleventh century, or the quality of their archery capabilities was at a low level,<sup>535</sup> this significant increase was only made possible by the fact that Alexios Komnenos hired cavalry archers from among the Byzantine allies and mercenaries from nearby peoples of the nomadic origin (the Uzes, Turkish mercenaries, and the Seljuks).<sup>536</sup> This is also reflected by the fact that in connection with this campaign, there are new names of the previously unknown Byzantine commanders belonging mostly to the lower social strata,<sup>537</sup> who were either thoroughly acquainted with archery and nomadic warfare (such as Georgios Pyrrhos and possibly Migidenos), or actually of the nomadic origin (Ouzas).

Reorganized in this way, the Byzantine army reached the surroundings of Larissa approximately at the end of March 1083.<sup>538</sup> Despite the fact that the emperor was driven by urgent pleas for help from the besieged city, he kept a cool head and tried to approach the city stealthily so that Bohemund had no idea about the movements and position of the imperial troops. According to the quite detailed account of Anna Komnene,<sup>539</sup> the Byzantines did not approach Larissa directly along the road leading from

<sup>535</sup> Paul W. Westermeyer, *The Development and Decline of Romano-Byzantine Archery from the Fourth to the Eleventh Centuries* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1996), 38–42 (dissertation).

<sup>536</sup> It is specific for the critical situation in which the Byzantine emperor found himself that he also included the extremely unreliable Uzes in the formation of the Byzantine army. Their combat deployment is believed to have taken place for the first time in the battle of Manzikert in 1071, on the eve of which the allies from among the Uzes collectively defected to the enemy's side. See Attaleiates, 157.

<sup>537</sup> It is obvious when compared to the list of Byzantine commanders who took part in the battle of Dyrrachion. See text above.

<sup>538</sup> This date is based on Anna Komnene's information that the siege of the city, which began on 3 October 1082, lasted a total of 6 months. *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 154); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 173–174. That means that it ended in early April. Since it is necessary to take into account some time for transfers as well as the fact that the hostilities around Larissa took place for several days (see text below), the Byzantine forces had to get close to the city as early as the end of March 1083.

<sup>539</sup> The military operations around Trikala and the subsequent lifting of its six-month siege represented not only the first victory of the Byzantines in the war against the Normans, but mainly Alexios Komnenos' eagerly awaited personal triumph. No wonder, therefore, that Anna Komnene describes all the events associated with it in great detail.

Thessalonica through the Tembi valley upstream the Pineios river.<sup>540</sup> At the place where this road starts following the river course near its mouth to the Aegean sea, the Byzantines turned left and continued by a detour toward the Kellion mountains,<sup>541</sup> passed Mount Kissabos on the right,<sup>542</sup> descended to the Vlach village of Ezeban, and from there proceeded to Plabitzia lying by an unknown river (near Androneia),<sup>543</sup> where they set up a camp. The next day they continued toward Larissa via the gardens of Delfinas<sup>544</sup> located in its immediate vicinity.<sup>545</sup> The main problem with this description containing a plenty of geographical information and names of various sites is that the awareness of the exact location of most of the mentioned toponyms has not been preserved (or the current reconstruction of their location is ambivalent), and it is very difficult to reconstruct what route the Byzantine army actually took.<sup>546</sup> According to modern findings, the Byzantines marched from the mouth of the Pineios river southward along the seashore, where they headed east, and through the defile and today's villages of Melivia, Agia, and Gerakari between the Ossa (Kissabos) and Pelion (Kellion) mountains entered the Thessalian plain due east of

<sup>540</sup> As Alexios Komnenos may have suspected that this main access road would be guarded or blocked by the Normans, he decided to stay away from it to keep the element of surprise. Era L. Vranoussi, "Le Mont des Kellia. Note sur un passage d'Anne Comnène," *ZRVI* 8 (1964): 460; Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 38; Kislinger, "Notizen," 137.

<sup>541</sup> Vranoussi argues that the Kellion mountain range can be identified with the Pelion mountains in today's region of Magnesia. See Vranoussi, "Kellia," 462–463; Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 186.

<sup>542</sup> Mount Ossa, alternative for Kissabos, reaches 1978 meters above sea level and is located south of the lower Pineios river. Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 188.

<sup>543</sup> The name of the river is unknown due to a lacuna in Anna Komnene's text. In the latest edition of the *Alexiad*, the toponym Salabria, which is a medieval name for the Pineios river, was inserted into this gap. *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 154). Some researchers accept this solution (Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174), while others consider this correction unfounded (Kislinger, "Notizen," 137). Given the supposed route of the Byzantine army's advance, which led considerably more to the south than the actual course of the Pineios river, Kislinger's view is probably correct.

<sup>544</sup> This name may refer to the leader of the 1066 Vlach uprising, who was a respected Larissa resident and local garrison commander Nikoulitzas Delfinas, or one of his relatives. For Delfinas, see Kekaumenos, 218; Litavrin, "Восстание," 124–125.

<sup>545</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 154).

<sup>546</sup> This fact has already been stated by Chalandon. See Chalandon, *Essai*, 89. For the same reason, places such as Plabitzia, Ezeban, Andronia, or Delfinas' gardens are not included in the latest systematic handbook on Thessalian historic topography. See Koder and Hild, *Hellas*; Kislinger, "Notizen," 137. As a result, some scholars commit serious errors. See, for example, Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 60–61.

Larissa<sup>547</sup> and pitched their camp at the Asmaki watercourse. Then the Byzantines veered to the southeast and stopped again south of Larissa at the Rebenikon rivulet (where Delfinas' gardens were probably located). However, Alexios Komnenos did not want the Normans besieging Larissa to notice his marching column, so he moved across the southern edge of the Thessalian plain roughly through today's village of Maurovouni<sup>548</sup> with the whole army to Trikala, which the Byzantines recaptured effortlessly.<sup>549</sup> There, the emperor intended to rethink his next course of action, inspect the terrain thoroughly and, on the basis of this information, choose the battle site, and determine the corresponding battle plan for the upcoming encounter.<sup>550</sup> In Trikala, however, he was caught up by a messenger with the latest desperate letter from Leo Kefalas, urging the emperor, rather indiscriminately, for a swift relief attack; otherwise Larissa would be in danger of falling into the Norman hands.<sup>551</sup>

<sup>547</sup> Glavínas, "Θεσσαλία," 38–39. Kislínger apparently made a typo in his description of the route when he wrote that Alexios Komnenos "*ließ das Kissabos-Gebirge links liegen.*" Kislínger, "Notizen," 137.

<sup>548</sup> There is a proposal for an alternative route made by Katsóni. In her opinion, Alexios Komnenos led his army north between the mountain massifs of Olympus and lower Olympus toward the present-day town of Elasson and from there south of the Kamvounia mountains to the lower Haliakmon river, where it turned south and reached Trikala from the north. See Polýmnia Katsóni, "Δρόμοι και ορεινές διαβάσεις στη μεσαιωνική δυτική Μακεδονία," *Vyzantina* 33 (2013–2014): 120–124. However, this "northern" route raises more problems with the location of disputed toponyms than it solves. At the same time, Katsóni ignores the positive identification of the Kissabos and Kellia mountains. Also, from a military point of view, the route proposed by her is too long and leads through much more challenging terrain than the hitherto agreed "southern" route and seems to be impassable or very difficult to pass for the army of approx. 15,000 men. Moreover, the march along this route would result in too much delay, which Alexios Komnenos certainly could not afford as Larissa was already on the verge of surrender.

<sup>549</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.3. (p. 155). By occupying Trikala, Alexios Komnenos succeeded in breaking communication links between the Normans besieging Larissa and their main base in Kastoria. Kislínger, "Notizen," 138.

<sup>550</sup> As part of the topographical reconnaissance, Alexios Komnenos did not hesitate to contact one of the local residents. *Alexias*, V.5.5. (p. 155); Stephenson, *Frontier*, 172; Kislínger, "Notizen," 138. This approach is understandable, as he appears to have entered the Thessalian soil for the first time in his life. The importance of detailed knowledge of the terrain is also emphasized in the Byzantine military manuals, see, for example, Dennis, "The Byzantines in Battle," *Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)*, ed. by K. Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 169.

<sup>551</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.4. (p. 155); Chalandon, *Essai*, 89.



Anna Komnene's description of the hostilities around Larissa lasting from four to seven days<sup>552</sup> at the beginning of April 1083<sup>553</sup> give the impression that Alexios Komnenos did not really strive to crush Bohemund and his host. The emperor's strategy was to pursue strictly limited goals and try to make the Normans lift the siege of Larissa and retreat.<sup>554</sup> Therefore, the main Byzantine strike was not aimed at the Norman host itself, but at the camp where the baggage train and all supplies of food and other material, as well as the plundered items collected by the Normans so far were stored.<sup>555</sup> However, in order for Alexios Komnenos to pillage the camp, it was first necessary to lure the main Norman forces out. To do so, Alexios Komnenos intended to take advantage of the fact that the Normans had become accustomed to the Byzantine inability to resist their heavy cavalry charge.<sup>556</sup> He also remembered very well how the Normans had tried their best to capture or kill him during previous encounters and logically assumed that it would be the case in the forthcoming conflict, too.<sup>557</sup> That is why he decided to split his army into two parts. The first part, led by Nikeforos Melissenos and Basileios Kourtikios (and possibly by Michael Doukas and Adrianos Komnenos), consisting probably of mixed units of light cavalry and infantry from Thessaly, Makedonia, and Thrace, and units belonging to the imperial entourage, was supposed to play the role of the bait. To make this ruse more convincing the emperor entrusted both commanders with imperial insignia<sup>558</sup> to make Bohemund believe that Alexios Komnenos himself is up against him with the same

<sup>552</sup>The battle of Larissa was not a single confrontation, but it consisted of several minor melees and skirmishes. The careful reading of Anna Komnene's thorough description of this battle full of various details of chronological character suggests that it lasted for at least four days. See *Alexias*, V.5.7. ff (p. 156–161). According to William of Apulia, the entire encounter could take up to a week, see note 583. Bünemann erroneously argues that the fighting near Larissa lasted only three days. See Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151.

<sup>553</sup>See note 503. Bünemann makes another chronological error here when he dates the battle of Larissa to May 1083. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151.

<sup>554</sup>This strategy is probably reflected in Anna Komnene's text, saying that "*some other method, the emperor knew, must be found to defeat the enemy.*" *Alexias*, V.5.5 (p. 155): "ὁ δὲ αὐτοκράτωρ δεῖν ἔγνω διὰ τινος πρόπου ἑτέρου αὐτοῦς καταγωνίσασθαι." See also Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 40.

<sup>555</sup>Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174.

<sup>556</sup>Birkenmeier, *Army*, 68.

<sup>557</sup>The same was the case during the battle of Dyrrachion or the battle of Joannina. See text above. See also Stephenson, *Frontier*, 172.

<sup>558</sup>*Alexias*, V.5.7. (p. 156); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 20; Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 40; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 472; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174.

old-fashioned tactics as usual. The dangerous role of the Alexios' doppelgänger appears to have been "played" by the emperor's younger brother Adrianos.<sup>559</sup> The second and more numerous part of the imperial troops under emperor's personal command included all the units of the aforementioned cavalry archers, that is, Turkish mercenaries (Migidenos), the Uzes (Ouzas), light infantry (Pyrrhos), and the Seljuks (Kamyres).<sup>560</sup> With all the troops, the emperor then moved cautiously from Trikala to the area east of Larissa—to the main road running along the right bank of the Pineios river from Thessalonica. There, he waited until sunset and then personally led his soldiers to a place known as Allage,<sup>561</sup> where he took a covert position in a nearby ravine.<sup>562</sup> In order to conceal this maneuver from Bohemund, Alexios Komnenos sent a vanguard light cavalry detachment from the other part of the army under Melissenos and Kourtikios' command against the Normans to the vicinity of Larissa to provoke a brief skirmish and then return so that the Normans would surely notice this part of the Byzantine forces.<sup>563</sup>

<sup>559</sup> For this, see Zonaras, 735–736; Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 114–115. Since Anna Komnene does not mention Adrianos Komnenos' participation in the battle (see also note 522), Chalandon believes that the imperial insignia was carried in the battle by *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos. Chalandon, *Essai*, 90; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 280. Given the aforementioned ambivalent relationship between Alexios Komnenos and Nikeforos Melissenos, this assumption is highly unlikely. Moreover, there is another compelling reason why Melissenos could not impersonate the emperor—the appearance. Many Norman knights had the opportunity to get to know Alexios Komnenos in person or see his face during the battles of Dyrrachion and Joannina. Adrianos Komnenos certainly looked more alike his older brother than Melissenos and, therefore, was much more credible as a double.

<sup>560</sup> For example, Georgios Pyrrhos seems to have commanded a light infantry unit. See text above. Thus, the mention of his name by Anna Komnene during the battle indicates the presence of the aforementioned detachment. At the onset of the encounter, Pyrrhos' footsoldiers were probably deployed in the section of the battle formation under Alexios Komnenos' personal command, as later during the fight the emperor dispatched Pyrrhos to attack the rear of the Norman reserve led by the count of Brienne. See *Alexias*, V.6.2. (p. 158). In a similar way, it is possible to estimate the location and tasks of other Byzantine troops during the battle.

<sup>561</sup> The exact location of this place is unknown, but the context indicates that it must have been quite close to the south or southeast of Larissa between the city and the Rebenikos river. Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 285. The name Allage is actually a Greek equivalent of the Latin term *mutatio*, meaning that this is where one of the Roman public post relay stations (*cursus publicus*) appears to have been located in the Antiquity. Therefore, Allage could lie on the road between Larissa and Farsala. Kislinger, "Notizen," 138.

<sup>562</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.8. (p. 157).

<sup>563</sup> *Alexias*, V.5.8. (p. 157); Zonaras, 735–736; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174.

The next day at dawn, Bohemund, eager to win another easy victory, decided to set off from the camp with his entire host. The Byzantine “bait” units were already waiting for him in position in sight of the Norman camp east of Larissa on the road leading from Thessalonica (i.e., from the expected direction).<sup>564</sup> The Norman host was divided into two consecutive formations of knights, the first led personally by Bohemund and the second reserve formation by *comestabulus* of Apulia, count of Brienne.<sup>565</sup> The overconfident Bohemund apparently had no idea about the second hidden part of the army under Alexios’ personal command lying in wait nearby. Exactly according to the emperor’s assumptions, the Normans immediately attacked the Byzantine troops playing the bait, who put up a token of resistance for a while, but after some time made a feigned retreat toward the Tembi valley (Lykostomion) located about twenty-nine kilometers to the northeast.<sup>566</sup> Meanwhile, Alexios Komnenos was cautiously following the development of the battle from his hidden position at Allage. As soon as he got the impression that his ruse had worked well enough, he sent a unit of light infantry headed by Georgios Pyrrhos in pursuit of advancing Normans to form a moving screen between them and their camp.<sup>567</sup> Then, like a bolt out of the blue, the rest of the cavalry archers<sup>568</sup> fearlessly attacked the Norman camp under the walls of Larissa.

<sup>564</sup> Bohemund could very clearly observe the imperial standards from the camp, horses covered in red (purple) shawls and raised spears clad with silver nails belonging to the imperial guard. *Alexias*, V.6.1. (p. 157); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174. Bohemund’s belief that Alexios Komnenos was before him is confirmed by William of Apulia. *Gesta*, 238. This means that the distance from the Norman camp to the position of the Byzantine troops could not exceed one kilometer; otherwise the Norman chronicler would not have been able to give the above details.

<sup>565</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.1. (p. 157). According to the description of William of Apulia, *comestabulus*, the count of Brienne, led the vanguard group, whereas Bohemund the second train which intervened in the fight only when the Byzantines fended off the attack of the first division. *Gesta*, 238.

<sup>566</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.1. (p. 157); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 20; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 174. Lykostomion means “wolf’s throat,” and in the Middle Ages this name was used to name the Tembi valley. Later in the twelfth century, a small fortress was known under this name, guarding the mouth of this valley. Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 208.

<sup>567</sup> See note 560.

<sup>568</sup> Apparently, they included Migidenos’ Turkish mercenaries, the Uzes under Ouzas’ command and possibly also 7000 Seljuk Turks.

As there were only a few soldiers defending it, their resistance was soon broken, and only a handful of them managed to escape.<sup>569</sup>

Meanwhile, Bohemund, entirely unaware of the development in his rear, was pursuing the retreating Byzantine troops. To prevent a complete destruction of his “bait,” Alexios Komnenos ordered Georgios Pyrrhos to shower the rear of the Norman formation (*conrois* led by count of Brienne) with arrows and perhaps also to send some of his cavalry archers as reinforcements. The Byzantines were instructed by the emperor to aim their arrows not at knights, but at their horses.<sup>570</sup> Soon, their intense archery started to have a noticeable effect, putting the Norman rear ranks in disarray, and in an attempt to save their precious mounts the knights began to form a defensive circle. Some of them, still not knowing where the arrows were coming from,<sup>571</sup> even lost their courage and preferred to flee toward Trikala which some of Bohemund’s men had already seized.<sup>572</sup> As a result of this unexpected ambush, Bohemund had to abandon the pursuit because he could not continue on his own without the support of the rearguard. The Byzantine “bait” swiftly took advantage of this delay and disappeared from sight in the clouds of dust, probably seeking shelter in the woods on the slopes of a long elevation stretching south of the Pineios river.<sup>573</sup> Despite this setback, Bohemund believed that he had scored

<sup>569</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.1. (p. 158); Zonaras, 736; *Gesta*, 238; Chalandon, *Essai*, 90; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 281; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 20; Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 41; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 172; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 472; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 138.

<sup>570</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.2. (p. 158); Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 41; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 175.

<sup>571</sup> In connection with this moment of the battle, both Anna Komnene and William of Apulia independently report the same fact that the view of the knights was also limited by the dense dust that was raised by horses of both the pursuers and the pursued. *Alexias*, V.6.2. (p. 158); *Gesta*, 238; Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 41.

<sup>572</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.3. (p. 160); Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 42–43. Since Trikala was previously occupied by the Byzantines, this was not a mere escape, as Anna Komnene believes, but a logical step, thanks to which the Normans reopened their communication links and also a possible retreat route to Kastoria. In fact, the knights had to be aware by then that their camp had been attacked and sacked by the Byzantines in the meantime.

<sup>573</sup> *Gesta*, 238. The exact location of the Byzantine troops’ hideout cannot be determined, but apparently was not more than ten kilometers from Larissa.

another victory over the Byzantines and, in a festive mood, paused to rest right on the southern bank of the river.<sup>574</sup>

Soon, however, the core of the Norman host was reached by three messengers sent by the count of Brienne from the rearguard, who apparently was still able to visually observe the situation in and around the Norman camp and informed Bohemund about Byzantine attack on the camp and the overall scale of the disaster.<sup>575</sup> The firstborn son of Robert Guiscard showed great self-control, determination, and courage at the moment. He promptly ordered the knights to mount their horses and, with the entire host, quickly returned to Larissa.<sup>576</sup> Imperial troops had already set the camp on fire, seized all the equipment and food supplies gathered there,<sup>577</sup> and, subsequently, with sizeable spoils sought refuge behind the city walls. The dismayed Normans could do nothing but set up a new improvised camp on a small elevation southwest of Larissa.<sup>578</sup> According to Anna Komnene, having achieved his main goal, Alexios Komnenos was unwilling to risk another fight, but his elated commanders, encouraged by the positive development of the battle, urged him to keep on attacking the retreating enemies. However, their uncoordinated pursuit enabled Bohemund to fend off their attacks with minimal losses on the Norman side, but with about 500 fallen Byzantine soldiers.<sup>579</sup> Alexios Komnenos tried to save the day by sending in the Turks under Migidenos' command. Their role was to organize an ambush for the returning Normans. However, the Normans managed to spot the approaching Turks in distance and thanks to their spirited charge forced them to flee toward the Pineios river.<sup>580</sup>

On the morning of the third day, Bohemund fully realized the unfavorable situation of his host and the untenability of his improvised position and decided to find a safer location where his knights and soldiers could

<sup>574</sup> According to William of Apulia, Bohemund rested with his knights on a hill. *Gesta*, 238. Perhaps Anna Komnene made up the whole story of the bragging Bohemund sucking grapes on an island in the middle of the Pineios river only to underline his excessive pride and arrogance. This is evidenced by the fact that in early April Bohemund simply could not have had ripe grapes at his disposal. See also Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 41–42; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 175.

<sup>575</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.4. (p. 158).

<sup>576</sup> *Gesta*, 238; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 472.

<sup>577</sup> *Gesta*, 238–240; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 151.

<sup>578</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.4. (p. 159).

<sup>579</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.4. (p. 159); Kislinger, “Notizen,” 139.

<sup>580</sup> *Alexias*, V.6.4. (p. 159); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 20.

regroup. His knights' mounts also needed urgent rest<sup>581</sup> and the possibility of undisturbed grazing and water supply in order to be able to recover. Thus, the Normans crossed the Pineios river and headed to the long, forested valley of the Titarisios river located north of Larissa, known to the local inhabitants as Palace of Domenikos, where they built a fortified camp.<sup>582</sup> Alexios Komnenos decided not to pursue the retreating enemy and instead began to summon all his troops to the city.<sup>583</sup> This operation continued until the dawn of the fourth day, when infantry detachments led by Michael Doukas finally returned to the city from the direction of the Tembi valley,<sup>584</sup> after they had so successfully played the role of the "bait." Since Thessalian, Makedonian, and Thracian *tagmata* were probably the only units that included infantry, Alexios Komnenos urgently needed them in an attempt to break into the narrow valley where the Normans had retreated.<sup>585</sup>

The emperor intended to send allied troops of the Turks and the Uzes to the valley, where they were to perform a feigned retreat after shooting volleys of arrows so as to lure the Normans into a hotheaded pursuit.<sup>586</sup> In front of a narrow entrance to the valley, he deployed his infantry units under Doukas' command,<sup>587</sup> which were to attack the charging Norman flanks and, in cooperation with the cavalry archers, inflict on them as many

<sup>581</sup> *Gesta*, 238.

<sup>582</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.1. (p. 159); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Glavinas, "Θεσσαλία," 42. Therefore, the new Norman camp was located approximately thirty kilometers northwest of Larissa. Originally, this site used to be the location of the ancient city of Chyretiai, and its ruins are still present about a kilometer northeast of today's village of Domeniko. One of the less used roads from Thessaly to the north to Makedonia led through the valley. See Koder and Hild, *Hellas*, 147–148.

<sup>583</sup> According to the description of William of Apulia, Alexios Komnenos did not wait one, but up to three days before he finally decided to proceed offensively against Bohemund. *Gesta*, 238; Kislinger, "Notizen," 139. In that case, the fight at Larissa would not last four days, but in total up to one week. See text above.

<sup>584</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.1. (p. 159). William of Apulia claims that the Byzantine troops were commanded by Nikeforos Melissenos and Adrianos Komnenos. *Gesta*, 238.

<sup>585</sup> In accordance with the recommendation contained in the anonymous treatise on the tenth-century warfare, it was precisely the infantry that was designed to occupy and secure narrow passes before the arrival of the main forces. At the same time, however, it is claimed that this order is not binding, and it is up to the commander whether he uses cavalry or infantry for this purpose. The basis for success in this operation was that the divisions did not intermingle. Dennis, *Treatises*, 285–287.

<sup>586</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.2. (p. 159); Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 175.

<sup>587</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.2. (p. 159).

casualties as possible. Nevertheless, Bohemund had learned his lesson and was much more cautious this time. First, he ordered his knights to dismount and create a solid shield wall on the other side of the valley entrance,<sup>588</sup> against which sorties of cavalry archers did not have much effect. Nevertheless, Michael Doukas misjudged the situation and believed that the Normans were on the brink of surrender and, on contrary to the original plan, decided to enter the valley in hope of defeating the Normans in a classic hand-to-hand combat. Yet, because of the narrow profile of the entrance, the cavalry archers intermingled with his infantrymen, and when trying to arrange in the battle formation, Bohemund ordered his knights to launch a general charge. The disorganized Byzantine infantrymen could not withstand the pressure and were routed. Subsequently, the panic spread to other Byzantine troops, which began to flee south toward the Pineios river.<sup>589</sup> Fortunately for the Byzantines, Ouzas managed to knock Bohemund's standard bearer off the horse with his spear.<sup>590</sup> Seeing Bohemund's standard plummeting to the ground, the Norman knights abandoned the pursuit and retreated toward Trikala.<sup>591</sup> A few days later, the entire Norman host left Trikala and moved to Kastoria.<sup>592</sup> Thus, Bohemund de facto finally acknowledged his defeat.

The victorious Alexios Komnenos returned with the army to Thessalonica, where he spent the next few months working intensively on strengthening and reorganizing imperial troops before the final phase of the war, which was to begin with the reconquest of Kastoria—the last

<sup>588</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.2. (p. 160).

<sup>589</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.2. (p. 160); Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 43.

<sup>590</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.3. (p. 160); Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 43.

<sup>591</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.3. (p. 160); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Glavinas, “Θεσσαλία,” 43; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 139; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 175.

<sup>592</sup> *Alexias*, V.7.3. (p. 160); *Gesta*, 240; Chalandon, *Essai*, 90; Böhm, “Kastoria,” 15; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 139. A retreat to Kastoria was also necessary because the area around Larissa, ravaged during the six-month siege, could not provide the Normans with compensation for food supplies destroyed by the Byzantines until the harvest period at the end of summer. Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 473.

Norman foothold in western Makedonia.<sup>593</sup> In the meantime, however, diplomatic means have come to the fore again. This time, the emperor's efforts focused on the Norman commanders, who since the end of the summer of 1082 had begun to show signs of dissatisfaction, anger, and fatigue, triggered by endless marching, monotonous and vain siege operations of numerous Byzantine fortresses, as well as never-ending fighting in difficult mountainous terrain on the borders between Epirus, western Makedonia, and northern Thessaly, all without sufficient financial reward.<sup>594</sup> The disillusionment of the rank-and-file soldiers was further bolstered by the loss of all plundered items, which fell into the hands of the Byzantines in Larissa. Thanks to the aforementioned desertion of Raoul of Pontoise around the same time, the Byzantines seem to have regained the control of Skopje and its surroundings. Alexios Komnenos intended to take advantage of the shattered morale within the ranks of Bohemund's host by making numerous generous financial bids to speed up its dissolution as much as possible.<sup>595</sup> He was well aware that since Guiscard's departure to southern Italy in April 1082, the Norman host under Bohemund's command had remained essentially without any external support and has in fact survived only by the pillaging of imperial territories. The funds left by Guiscard for the soldiers' pay were certainly

<sup>593</sup> Böhm, "Kastoria," 15. Anna Komnene claims that her father returned to Constantinople, where he presided over the trial against John Italos and his pupils. However, since this trial took place already in March and April 1082 (see note 453), this whole passage at the end of the Book V of the *Alexiad* is chronologically misplaced. *Alexias*, V.8.1. (p. 161–167). Further testimony that could refer to the emperor's return to the capital comes from the pen of William of Apulia, who first reports that the count of Brienne left Larissa for Kastoria and Alexios Komnenos for Constantinople. *Gesta*, 240. But this impression of the simultaneity of both lines is false, as William ends the description of events in 1083 by the battle of Larissa and the Venetian attack against Dyrrachion and no longer mentions the siege of Kastoria by the Byzantines. Therefore, the information of emperor's departure to the capital cannot be linked directly to the end of hostilities at Larissa but only to the complete end of the fighting season at the end of 1083. Thus, all this information about Alexios' departure to Constantinople at the turn of spring and summer 1083 is invalid and does not need to be taken into account, and only confirms the fact that he did not return to the capital until 1 December 1083. *Alexias*, VI.8.1. (p. 184). It certainly makes more sense because the emperor would not have traveled to the capital in the midst of a successful campaign only to return a few months later to conquer Kastoria. It is precisely because of Alexios Komnenos' stay in Constantinople that some authors put the siege of Kastoria erroneously to the spring of 1084, instead of November 1083. See, for example, Kislinger, "Notizen," 140.

<sup>594</sup> Kislinger, "Notizen," 139.

<sup>595</sup> Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 172; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 175.



insufficient and quickly spent.<sup>596</sup> That is why the emperor was able to send secret offers to individual Norman commanders, urging them to demand the unpaid cash from Bohemund for two-and-a-half years of military service outside Italy.<sup>597</sup> In the event that Bohemund did not comply, the emperor advised them to strongly request their payment, and if still unsuccessful, he promised them lavish gifts, honorary titles at the imperial court, and the possibility of a well-paid service in the ranks of the Byzantine army, if they decide to change sides. To those not interested the emperor offered the possibility of safe passage home from the Byzantine territory through the Hungarian kingdom.<sup>598</sup> Gradually, Bohemund came under strong pressure of his commanders, eventually promising them to fetch the due cash payments from Guiscard in person. To that end he actually returned to Aulon on the coast of Epirus in early August 1083 from where he intended to board the ship to Mezzogiorno.<sup>599</sup> Bohemund entrusted the defense of Kastoria<sup>600</sup> to his second-in-command, count of Brienne. Other troops under the command of Peter of Aulps were still occupying the area of both Poloboi north of Ochrid.<sup>601</sup>

As the Byzantine fleet was not ready for combat operations at sea in March 1083<sup>602</sup> (before the battle of Larissa and before the start of the sailing season), Alexios Komnenos again decided to ask the Venetians to cut off the Norman communication routes between Epirus and Apulian ports by patrolling the coastline and, simultaneously, to try to oust the Norman garrisons out of the ports on the Epirotic coast. Naturally, the main

<sup>596</sup>In view of the Normans, however, full responsibility for this difficult situation did not lie with Bohemund (or the count of Brienne), but with his father Robert Guiscard, whose attention and energy were fully occupied by major political events in southern Italy and Rome. Therefore, it is no wonder that Bohemund did not receive any funding, nor did his host get any reinforcements in 1082 and 1083. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153–154. See also text below.

<sup>597</sup>Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 473; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 175.

<sup>598</sup>*Alexias*, V.7.4. (p. 160–161); Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Böhm, “Kastoria,” 15; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 176.

<sup>599</sup>Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 173; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 139; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153.

<sup>600</sup>In Böhm’s view, Kastoria may have been more than just an important stronghold, probably representing the temporary headquarters of all the Balkan territories conquered by the Normans. Böhm, “Kastoria,” 16–17.

<sup>601</sup>*Alexias*, V.7.5. (p. 161); Chalandon, *Essai*, 90; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 281; Böhm, “Kastoria,” 15; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 176.

<sup>602</sup>See text below.

objective of these efforts was the most important base in the area—Dyrrachion. Here, the emperor skillfully took advantage of the fact that the restoration of the imperial rule in this port was in line with the commercial interests of the Venetians themselves. Unfortunately, there is no detailed information about the specific course of these operations, because neither Anna Komnene nor Malaterra refer to the recapturing of Dyrrachion. Only William of Apulia provides some laconic information in this respect, saying that the Venetians were able to retake Dyrrachion, but the Norman garrison barricaded itself in the citadel and continued to resist. The attackers at least thoroughly plundered the lower part of the city, which was essentially depopulated as a result of previous war events.<sup>603</sup> The struggle over Dyrrachion had to take place around mid-July 1083, and certainly before Bohemund's arrival in Aulon in early August 1083,<sup>604</sup> because it was the rumors of him coming that forced the Venetians to return aboard their ships and anchor off the Epirotic coast, where they formed a sort of floating port on the waves by lashing the ships together.<sup>605</sup> In this way, the Venetians spent the winter while ensuring a direct naval blockade of the Norman communication lines until the spring of 1084.<sup>606</sup>

When the news about Bohemund's departure to Aulon reached Thessalonica, Alexios Komnenos decided that the most favorable moment

<sup>603</sup> *Gesta*, 240; Nicol, *Venice*, 58; Prinzing, "Epirus," 11; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153; Bennett, "Naval Activity," 55. Bennett mistakenly believes that the Venetians were assisted in this fight by the ships of the Byzantine fleet.

<sup>604</sup> *Gesta*, 240; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21–22; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 176. William of Apulia claims that the Venetians stayed in the conquered lower part of Dyrrachion for two weeks. *Gesta*, 240: "*Remorans ter quinque diebus gens studet utilibus vacuare Venetica rebus Dirachium.*" Chalandon and Loud wrongly assume that the Venetians conquered not only the lower city, but also the Dyrrachion citadel. See Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 281; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219.

<sup>605</sup> *Gesta*, 240; Kislinger, "Notizen," 139–140; Böhm, *Flota*, 130.

<sup>606</sup> See text below.

for the reconquest of Kastoria had come.<sup>607</sup> Given that its garrison consisted of no more than a few hundred Normans under the command of the count of Brienne, the imperial troops earmarked for the siege of the city were probably far less numerous than during previous military encounters. This assumption is also supported by the fact that, besides the emperor himself, there was only one other high-ranking Byzantine commander mentioned in connection with the siege of Kastoria—*kouropalatēs* Georgios Palaiologos,<sup>608</sup> who had previously distinguished himself in the heroic defense of Dyrrachion. On this basis, it can be assumed that only those units that Alexios Komnenos took with him directly from Constantinople in the spring of 1083 participated in this new campaign<sup>609</sup> and that other units of the Byzantine army, that is, *tagmata* from Thessaly and from Makedonia and Thrace, probably returned to their bases (Thessalonica and Adrianoupolis, respectively), where they could enjoy the much-needed respite and replace the losses suffered in previous years.<sup>610</sup> The same seems to apply to the detachments of the Uzes and Turkish mercenaries; allied forces of 7000 Seljuks apparently returned to Asia Minor after the victory at the battle of Larissa.<sup>611</sup> Therefore, the total number of Byzantine soldiers designated to conquer the city was relatively small and did not exceed 2000–3000 men. This small field army, led by the emperor in person, set out from Thessalonica to Kastoria, where it began to besiege the city at the end of August 1083. As stated above, Kastoria is very conveniently located in terms of defense, because it sits on

<sup>607</sup>The siege of this important Norman foothold is traditionally dated to November 1083. Chalandon, *Essai*, 91; Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1260–1262; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153; Kisliger, “Notizen,” 140. In fact, there is no direct support for this dating in the preserved written sources. On the contrary, Anna Komnene’s description suggests that the siege of Kastoria was a relatively time-consuming event. See text below. Since it is safely known that Alexios Komnenos returned to Constantinople on Friday 1 December 1083 and just in time for the birth of his firstborn daughter Anna the following day (see note 488), and that he spent several days on the road in Mosynopolis in Thrace to punish the Paulikians (*Alexias*, VI.2.1 (p. 170)), the siege of Larissa had to start much earlier. It is the departure of Bohemund to Aulon in August 1083, which was the result of emperor’s diplomatic activities during his stay in Thessalonica aimed at the dissatisfied Norman commanders that appears to be the fitting moment.

<sup>608</sup>*Alexias*, VI.1.2 (p. 169).

<sup>609</sup>See text above. Alexios Komnenos certainly primarily used infantry for siege-related operations. *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 168): “ὁ ἀντοκράτωρ (...) τὸ ὀπλιτικὸν αὐτῆς ἀνεκαλεῖτο.”

<sup>610</sup>It is possible that Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata* did not enjoy the rest for too long and were soon given a new assignment. See text and note 142 in Chap. 5.

<sup>611</sup>When besieging a fortified city, units of mounted archers would be useless.

the neck of a large mountainous peninsula (with the highest peak at 800 meters above sea level) projecting into the lake of the same name. Therefore, access to the city from the ground was possible from one direction only, which was naturally heavily fortified by a strong city wall pierced by three gates (with only the middle one leading to the city itself).<sup>612</sup>

Alexios Komnenos was aware of the enormous advantages that such a strongly fortified position provided to its defenders and, therefore, had wooden siege machines (*helepoleis*) and trebuchets (*petrobola mechanēmata*) transported to the city.<sup>613</sup> At the same time, in order to protect his valuable siege engines from the surprising sorties of defenders, he had the Byzantine camp protected by a wooden palisade and sentry towers, which, as a result, hermetically cut off Kastoria from the mainland.<sup>614</sup> Initially, the hostilities were limited to the bombardment of walls in order to cause as much damage as possible or to make them collapse. In fact, this was achieved after some time, but the Norman defenders were so determined that subsequent attacks against the walls ended in failure.<sup>615</sup> Facing this unfavorable turn of events, Alexios Komnenos, unwilling to sacrifice his soldiers in repeated futile attacks against the walls and loathing to be trapped in the cold and unpleasant mountain valley by the approaching winter, came up with an alternative plan. It was based on the transfer of a large detachment of soldiers under Georgios Palaiologos' command to the lakeside of the peninsula so that they could attack the fortifications of Kastoria from the unexpected side—from the east shore of the lake where minimum resistance was expected.<sup>616</sup> To this end, the emperor had wooden boats and

<sup>612</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 168); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1260; Böhm, *Flota*, 127. The remnants of the walls running across the entrance to the peninsula are still visible to this day. The main (central) gate was located at the eastern end of today's Davaki Square (*plateia Davaki*) until 1949. The Byzantine camp was probably situated somewhere directly opposite it at a distance of about 200 meters (outside the range of defenders' missile weapons), probably at the level of today's Street of 11 November (*odos 11is Noemvriou*).

<sup>613</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 168); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1261; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 474; Böhm, *Flota*, 126.

<sup>614</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 168).

<sup>615</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 168); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1261; Böhm, *Flota*, 126.

<sup>616</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 168); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1261.

barges (*akatia*),<sup>617</sup> probably from the Vardar river valley,<sup>618</sup> transported on wagons by road through Moliskos<sup>619</sup> to Lake Kastoria. On the eve of the final attack, Palaiologos' soldiers were covertly shipped across the lake to the east shore of the peninsula.<sup>620</sup> From there they approached the eastern part of the city walls along the ridge completely unnoticed by the defenders. The next morning at dawn, Alexios Komnenos signaled Palaiologos to attack, at the same time charging with the rest of the troops from the front. Simultaneous attack from both sides caught the Normans completely off guard.<sup>621</sup> In spite of the fact that they managed to stand their ground, this sudden two-pronged attack demoralized the ordinary soldiers and lower commanders to such a degree that they decided to surrender Kastoria to the emperor.<sup>622</sup> Only the count of Brienne strongly objected, yet to no avail. Most of the Norman garrison surrendered and entered Byzantine services.<sup>623</sup> The lone *comestabulus* returned to Aulon to Bohemund.<sup>624</sup> Having learned the news of the fall of Kastoria, another

<sup>617</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 168); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1261; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 474; Böhm, *Flota*, 126.

<sup>618</sup> Böhm argues that the vessels in question may have belonged to the military fleet of the province of Thessalonica used for patrolling the Vardar river. Böhm, *Flota*, 130. However, he did not take into account the fact that the ships were transported from the Vardar river through Moliskos, which would indicate that they belonged rather under the administration of the province of Boulgaria. It is very likely that they were hastily seized fishing barges with no connection to Byzantine military.

<sup>619</sup> Moliskos is believed to be located between Pelagonia and Moglena in the Black river valley (*Crna reka*), the right-hand tributary of the Vardar, in today's Republic of Makedonia. Kravari, *Macédoine*, 302.

<sup>620</sup> This means that all the Normans were concentrated inside the city walls and the rest of the peninsula was left unguarded, which would also provide further evidence that the Norman garrison was relatively small. To this day, a small bay near today's monastery of Panagia Mauriotissa is considered the landing site of Palaiologos' detachment. According to the local tradition and opinions of some scholars, this monastery was founded during the reign of Alexios Komnenos, precisely in memory of the glorious recapture of Kastoria. However, there are also opposing views, see Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1261, 1263–1265.

<sup>621</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.4. (p. 169); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1261.

<sup>622</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.4. (p. 169); Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1262; Böhm, “Kastoria,” 15; Böhm, *Flota*, 128.

<sup>623</sup> All Normans who chose to serve in the Byzantine army were to gather under the imperial standard located near St. George's church in Kastoria. *Alexias*, VII.1.4. (p. 169); Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 474. This church is located in the eastern part of today's Kastoria, but in the eleventh century, it was located outside the walls. Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1262.

<sup>624</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.4. (p. 169); Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 281; Glavinas, “Καστοριά,” 1262; Böhm, “Kastoria,” 15; Böhm, *Flota*, 129; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 474.

Norman commander, Peter of Aulps, also defected to the Byzantine side with all troops under his command.<sup>625</sup>

Bohemund, already dispirited by the development of events, left the remnants of the Norman invasion host in Epirus and by November 1083<sup>626</sup> sailed back to southern Italy. He arrived at his father's court in Salerno, where he personally described the failure of the campaign.<sup>627</sup> Alexios Komnenos returned triumphantly to the Byzantine capital, which he entered in the midst of the festivities on 1 December 1083.<sup>628</sup> He could be extremely satisfied with the course of military operations against Bohemund in 1083; he managed to save Larissa, where he gave a severe blow to the henceforth unstoppable Normans; through diplomacy he dismantled Bohemund's host and by the winter pushed the Normans back to Epirus to the Ionian and Adriatic coasts. The possibility that the Normans could pose a severe threat to Thessalonica, or even Constantinople itself, which was alarmingly real just a few months ago, was reduced to zero. The Venetians again promised to patrol the waters of the Otranto Strait. Bohemund and especially the originator of the whole attack against the Byzantine Empire, Robert Guiscard, were both fully occupied with events in Italy. Of the once powerful expeditionary Norman invasion host, only

<sup>625</sup> Böhm, "Kastoria," 15–16. However, it is possible that Peter of Aulps joined the service of the Byzantine emperor much later, only after the death of Robert Guiscard in July 1085, as he is mentioned by Orderic Vitalis as one of Guiscard's vassals who faithfully stayed by his side until the very end. Orderic Vitalis, 34.

<sup>626</sup> This date is based on the estimated date of Byzantine recapture of Kastoria, which, according to Chalandon and Glavinas, occurred either at the end of October or early November 1083. Chalandon, *Essai*, 91; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 281; Glavinas, "Καστοριά," 1262. See also Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 21; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 153. Theotokis is of a different opinion, as he dates Bohemund's departure to southern Italy to spring 1084. See Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 179.

<sup>627</sup> Loud, *Guiscard*, 219; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 173; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 154. This would mean that the siege of Kastoria was not as effortless and brief as some scholars have imagined so far. See, for example, Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 62. It is enough to take into account the thorough preparations of the Byzantines before the siege itself (building a fortified camp with palisades and wooden watchtowers to isolate the city, copious transportation and systematic deployment of siege engines and stone-throwers), or later transportation of boats up from the Vardar river on wagons, which must have been time-consuming. See text above. According to Orderic Vitalis, Bohemund's return was also hastened by the fact that he had sustained an unspecified injury in previous hostilities. During his convalescence in Salerno, Bohemund is said to have almost fallen victim to poison administered by doctors at the behest of his stepmother Sikelgaita. See Orderic Vitalis, 30.

<sup>628</sup> *Alexias*, VII.8.1. (p. 183); Chalandon, *Essai*, 91; Glavinas, "Καστοριά," 1262–1263.

demoralized remnants garrisoned in Dyrrachion, Aulon and Korfu, remained.<sup>629</sup> The days of Norman presence on the Byzantine soil seemed to be numbered.

### 4.3.3 *Guiscard's Final Attack (1084–1085)*

Regardless of Guiscard's intentions and instincts, which surely urged him to rush to Epirus in order to save the crumbling conquered territory as soon as possible, the pressing affairs in Rome required his full attention until July 1084, when he was finally able to return to Salerno.<sup>630</sup> In the meantime, every month of his absence not only did give the Byzantine emperor a golden opportunity to gradually reduce the last residues of Norman presence in Epirus but also allowed him to continuously strengthen his position on the imperial throne in Constantinople. The latter is illustrated by the following episodes. After his return to the capital in November 1083, Alexios Komnenos, glorified by the victory at Larissa and the conquest of Kastoria, decided to deal with the unruly Paulikians who were swiftly subjected to severe punitive measures. Such steps would have been impossible before.<sup>631</sup> Moreover, the emperor had to face charges and "whisper campaign" for expropriating unused liturgical utensils from the orthodox church.<sup>632</sup> To this end, at the turn of 1083 and 1084, he convened a synod at the Imperial palace in Blachernae, where he intended to defend his emergency measures before the civilian and religious elites of the Byzantine Empire in person.<sup>633</sup> However, this time, the undisputed reputation of the recent winner over the Normans allowed him to successfully withstand this critical situation. Simultaneously, a conspiracy against the emperor was revealed in the autumn of 1083, involving some unnamed senators and high military commanders, as well as the aforementioned

<sup>629</sup> Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22.

<sup>630</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 154. For a brief description of Guiscard's activities from spring 1082 until summer 1084, the focus of which already lies outside the scope of this work, see Loud, *Guiscard*, 219–222; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 450–468.

<sup>631</sup> *Alexias*, VI.2.1ff. (p. 170–171).

<sup>632</sup> See text above.

<sup>633</sup> *Alexias*, VI.3.1ff (p. 171–172); Glavinas, "Επίς, 87; Viada A. Arutjunova, "К вопросу о взаимоотношениях Византии с Печенегами и Половцами во время норманской кампании," *VV* 33 (1972): 117, 119.

Raoul of Pontoise, who had defected to Byzantine services a year ago.<sup>634</sup> In this case, Alexios Komnenos' political survival was likewise greatly boosted by his success against the Normans—the conspiracy was revealed fairly quickly, the key protagonists sent to exile, and their property duly confiscated.<sup>635</sup>

Since military operations from 1081 to 1083 severely depleted the Byzantine ground forces, Alexios Komnenos decided in early 1084 to finally deploy the few and untried units of the Byzantine navy, which had been undergoing gradual restoration since his accession to the throne. As mentioned above, at the time of the first Norman attack on the Byzantine territories in Epirus, the Byzantine navy's presence probably consisted of only a few dromons belonging to the Imperial squadron (*basilikon dromōnion*) and possibly several other vessels of the central Constantinopolitan fleet (a maximum of twelve to twenty vessels in varied

<sup>634</sup> His involvement in the conspiracy is presumed by Cheynet. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 94. See text above.

<sup>635</sup> *Alexias*, VI.4.1. (p. 173); Zonaras, 736; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 94.



technical and battle-ready condition).<sup>636</sup> As early as April 1081, besides receiving the senior court title of *sebastos*, Alexios' youngest brother Nikeforos also became the fleet commander (*droungarios tou stolou* /

<sup>636</sup>The apparent decline of the navy at the time is suggested by the fact that no navy commander (*droungarios tōn ploimōn*) is known from this period, except for the information that Nikeforos III Botaneiates appointed an anonymous individual to this post in 1078. Attaleiates, 270–271. See also Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 158–159. From the sigillographic material, a seal of a certain *droungarios tōn ploimōn* Constantine who held the honorary court title of *bestarchēs* is preserved, yet no written sources mention him. His last name is unknown, and the seal is dated to the third quarter of the eleventh century (no later than 1085) when Alexios Komnenos created a new senior command position (*megas doux tou stolou*). See Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 379–380. However, it is not certain that this Constantine was identical with the anonymous navy commander appointed by Nikeforos Botaneiates or Alexios Komnenos respectively. See also note 247 in Chap. 2. During the summer of 1081, the imperial squadron could have had three to five vessels, and individual squadrons of the central Constantinopolitan fleet had a similar number. It can also be assumed that the imperial squadron was not affected by the decline of the entire navy (due to its constant use by Byzantine emperors during this period). Estimating the number of operational vessels subordinated to the central fleet in Constantinople is even more problematic. A clue could be the events during the Komnenian coup in early April 1081, which, thanks to the intervention of Georgios Palaiologos, involved all the remaining ships of the Byzantine fleet. Originally, Nikeforos Botaneiates ordered these vessels to provide quick transport for Nikeforos Melissenos to Constantinople, as he was to ascend to the throne after the aforementioned emperor. However, Georgios Palaiologos managed to persuade a certain *spatharios* and commander of these ships to join the Komnenian coup. These ships then blocked the sea passage through the Bosphorus between the shores of Asia Minor (where Nikeforos Melissenos' troops were located near the town of Damalis) and Constantinopolitan ports, thus contributing significantly to the final success of the Komnenoi family. *Alexias*, II.9.1ff. (p. 82); Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 158; Böhm, *Flota*, 108–110. The participation of *spatharios* indicates the presence of the commander of the imperial squadron, as it is strikingly similar to the title awarded to this command post (*prōtopatharios tēs fialēs*, see text and note 143 in Chap. 2). However, it is clear that several other ships of the central Constantinopolitan fleet must have taken part in the action too, as five ships of the imperial squadron would probably not have been enough to ensure a close blockade of all the major Constantinopolitan ports (e.g., Julian's harbor and Theodosios' harbor), while still providing transport of Nikeforos Melissenos with his armed retinue to Constantinople. Theoretically, at least three more squadrons of three to five ships of the Constantinopolitan fleet were needed to carry out these tasks. Therefore, the Byzantine navy consisted of possibly 12–20 warships during this period. Naturally, if this number is compared to 150 ships of the Norman fleet (50 galleys and 100 transport vessels, see text above), it becomes evident that it was a woefully low number.

*droungarios tōn ploimōn*).<sup>637</sup> However, at the turn of spring and summer 1081, despite critical situation, the existing Byzantine warships were not sent into combat,<sup>638</sup> because they would constitute only a symbolic aid to the Venetian naval forces, whose assistance Alexios Komnenos had secured through the skilled use of diplomacy. Over the following years, the emperor turned to a highly experienced soldier and naval commander, by then surely retired, (*prōto?*)*kouropalatēs* Michael Maurix.<sup>639</sup> The two men were bound together by a personal acquaintance dating back to times before Alexios Komnenos took the throne, specifically to 1076.<sup>640</sup> Moreover, Maurix, residing at Herakleia of Pontike on the Black Sea coast, appears to have maintained a small private army funded by himself even after the end of his active service in 1078, mainly to protect his estates

<sup>637</sup> *Alexias*, III.4.2. (p. 96); Guiland, “Marine,” 220. Considering his young age (under 20, as he was born around 1062, see Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 118), Nikeforos Komnenos most likely had no experience in leading warships into a sea battle, and his appointment was purely political. See also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 232–233.

<sup>638</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 179–180. Based on the misleading references of Anna Komnene, some scholars erroneously believe that the Byzantine fleet was deployed in 1081 under Maurix’ command, see Stephenson, *Frontier*, 168; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180; Stanton, *Operations*, 53. For the actual state of the Byzantine navy in 1081, see text as well as note 636.

<sup>639</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.1. (p. 124): “ὁ Μαύριξ μετὰ τοῦ ῥωμαϊκοῦ ἀπέπλευσε στόλου”; *Gesta*, 240: “*Classis Alexinae dux Mabrica venerat.*”; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 100; Böhm, *Flota*, 94–95, 221–222; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180. Michael Maurix was probably the only experienced and loyal admiral at the time who Alexios Komnenos could entrust with the command of the restored Byzantine fleet. Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 163. Maurix did not come from an aristocratic family (Bryennios, 197); his successful naval career began around the middle of the eleventh century, and the first major position he held was the *strategos* of Chios. During the 1060s and 1070s, Maurix, already as *bestarchēs kai katepanō Dyrrachiou* (since 1068 with the title *magistros*), participated in both naval and ground engagements against the Normans in southern Italy, and in 1067 even for a short while wrestled control over the ports of Brindisi and Otranto from the Normans. In 1070, he commanded the defense of Otranto against Guiscard’s host. Later, he was transferred to Asia Minor. His last official position before retirement was between 1077 and 1078 in Antioch, Syria, where he held the title of *kouropalatēs* and *doux*. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 196–198. Maurix is also relatively well known from sigillographic material, see Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, 125; Jordanov, *Corpus* 1, 74; Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 278; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 423–424, 492. By the time Alexios Komnenos appointed him as the commander of the Byzantine fleet, he could have been around sixty to seventy years old, and it is also possible that he was awarded a senior court title of *prōtokouropalatēs* on this occasion. For this high court title, see Seibt, *Bleisiegeln*, 168–171.

<sup>640</sup> Bryennios, 197–199.

against the Seljuk raids.<sup>641</sup> Therefore, it is hardly surprising that it was him who the emperor appointed as the commander of the still very humble Byzantine naval forces, which were to sail to Epirus to fight the Normans and thus provide help to the Venetians. However, the core of the newly formed Byzantine fleet, which was strengthened by captured or chartered pirate vessels (apparently, including their entire crews as well),<sup>642</sup> was certainly not ready for immediate action. Moreover, the hostilities between 1082 and 1083 mostly took place on the ground, which excluded the possibility of intervention by the restored Byzantine fleet. The long-awaited appropriate moment finally came in the spring of 1084, when the Byzantine fleet joined the Venetians guarding the shores of Epirus since the autumn of the previous year.<sup>643</sup> The base of the allied united Byzantine-Venetian navy became the island of Korfu.<sup>644</sup>

<sup>641</sup> Ibid. On the basis of Bryennios' mention of a private army, Ahrweiler, Pryor, Böhm, and other researchers assume that Maurix also had a private naval squadron at his disposal. See Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 162–163; Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 100; Böhm, *Flota*, 95; Marcin Böhm, “Konstantynopolińska eskadra cesarska w dobie panowania Komnenów (1081–1185),” in *Miasto na skrzyżowaniu mórz I kontynentów. Wczesno- i średnobiazantyński Konstantynopol jako miasto portowe*, ed. by Miroslav J. Leszka and Kiril Marinow, *Byzantina Lodziensia XXIII*, (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017), 49, and most recently also Max Ritter, “Naval Basis, Arsenal, Aplekta: Logistics and Commands of the Byzantine Navy (7th–12th c.),” in *Seasides of Byzantium, Harbours and anchorages of a Mediterranean Empire*, ed. by Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Taxiarchis G. Kolias and Falko Daim, (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2021), 209. This very tempting premise, yet unsupported in the written sources, should be therefore entirely rejected.

<sup>642</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 176). Anna Komnene is silent about the origin of these pirates, but because they had to come from the waters around the Byzantine capital (i.e., the Aegean Sea, the only maritime area still under shaky imperial control), they were probably former Byzantine sailors or residents of the Aegean islands who turned to piracy. Böhm, *Flota*, 130. The Normans also used the services of pirates, but only of those who came primarily from areas adjacent to southern Italy (the Dalmatian Adriatic coast).

<sup>643</sup> Nicol, *Venice*, 58. This dating of the deployment of the Byzantine fleet against the Normans is contradicted by Anna Komnene, who argues that the Byzantine fleet led by Maurix was active at the turn of 1081 and 1082, or in the spring of 1082. *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 124). Due to the reasons explained above, such dating is highly unrealistic, and the above description represents another case of Anna Komnene's chronological displacement. Moreover, the joint actions of the united Byzantine-Venetian fleet during 1084 are confirmed by William of Apulia, whose narration provides the correct chronological order of the main events of this phase of the Byzantine-Norman war. See *Gesta*, 240, 244. The same conclusion was made by Kislinger and should be viewed as valid. Kislinger, “Notizen,” 141. See also Böhm, *Flota*, 131; Howard-Johnston, “Reading,” 494.

<sup>644</sup> *Gesta*, 240; Nicol, *Venice*, 58; Böhm, *Flota*, 131.

The composition and strength of the Byzantine naval forces sent to aid the Venetians are unknown. However, on the basis of the scattered sketchy references in the sources, it can be concluded that the Byzantine fleet represented the weaker component of the combined Byzantine-Venetian forces, both in number and in size, as the Byzantine ships were certainly smaller than the Venetian ones. Based on the above estimates of the number of combat-ready vessels of the central Constantinopolitan fleet and the imperial fleet and the fact that Alexios Komnenos had a number of new vessels commissioned promptly between 1081 and 1084,<sup>645</sup> it can be assumed that no more than thirty Byzantine warships joined the Venetian ones. As mentioned above, varied crews (consisting partly of experienced sailors who served in the Byzantine fleet before 1081, fresh recruits, and ex-pirates pressed into imperial service) served on board of this heterogeneous fleet. This fact certainly reduced its combat value and overall effectiveness already before the fighting began.<sup>646</sup> As regards the type of vessels, it can be assumed that the vast majority of warships appears to have been dromons (*chelandia*),<sup>647</sup> or rather smaller oared ships (*galeai*),<sup>648</sup> accompanied by several originally merchant ships, which fulfilled the role of supply vessels.<sup>649</sup>

In the spring months of 1084, the combined Byzantine-Venetian fleet took control of the waters along the coast of Epirus and almost completely cut off the maritime connections of the remaining Norman garrisons in Epirus with southern Italy.<sup>650</sup> This isolation then allowed Byzantine ground forces, in cooperation with the navy, to reconquer all territories in Epirus (namely, ports of Butrint and Aulon), with the exception of the Dyrrachion citadel and the Korfu citadel, which were fiercely defended by

<sup>645</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 176); Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 136.

<sup>646</sup> Despite this, Anna Komnene claims that there were armed men “*experienced in naval warfare*” aboard the ships. Apparently, she was referring to the veterans who had served in the Byzantine fleet before 1081. *Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 176); Böhm, *Flota*, 130.

<sup>647</sup> Anna Komnene uses anachronic ancient terms for these ships—*diēreis* and *triēreis*. *Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 176). They are referred to in the Norman Latin sources as *chelandia*. See *Gesta*, 244: “*Innumeras bello Danai duxere chelindros.*”

<sup>648</sup> These smaller, fast, and mobile oared monoreme ships are probably referred to in Anna Komnene’s text as “*pirate ships*.” See *Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 176).

<sup>649</sup> These are not mentioned in the *Alexiad* at all, but due to period custom, their presence in the formation of the Byzantine fleet is more than certain.

<sup>650</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 124).

the Normans.<sup>651</sup> Probably in late spring 1084, the Venetians decided to return to Venice.<sup>652</sup> The Byzantine part of the allied fleet appears to have lingered in the area to provide at least basic maritime cover of the Epirotic shores, as well as patrolling forces in the event of a new Norman attack. Alexios Komnenos estimated Robert Guiscard's intentions accurately. Although the Norman duke did not return to Salerno until July 1084 and the most favorable period for resuming the attack on the Byzantine Empire was nearly over, the possibility of remaining idle until the spring of 1085 was for Guiscard out of question. The Norman duke of Apulia and Calabria immediately began preparations for another full-scale campaign, analogous to the preparations of 1081 described above. The main motive that undoubtedly fueled Guiscard's vigorous action was an attempt to prevent the fall of the last two Norman footholds in Epirus, that is, the citadels in Dyrrachion and Korfu, which had already been surrounded by the Byzantine troops.<sup>653</sup>

For his second attempt to conquer Byzantine territories in the Balkans, Guiscard had to equip a virtually new fleet, as the former one was decimated in the previous naval engagements against the Venetians.<sup>654</sup>

<sup>651</sup> Kislinger, "Notizen," 141–142; Prinzing, "Epirus," 11; Aléxios G. C. Savvídís, *Τα βυζαντινά Επάνησα 11<sup>ος</sup> – αρχές 13<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα. Το ναυτικό θέμα Κεφαλληνίας στην Υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο* (Athens, 1986), 22. By contrast, Pryor wrongly assumes that both Dyrrachion and Korfu were already in the hands of the Byzantines at that time. Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 100. Nicol and Loud hold a similar view about Dyrrachion, see Nicol, *Venice*, 58; Loud, *Guiscard*, 219. The exact moment when the Byzantines reoccupied the ports of Aulon and Butrint is unknown. The fighting spirit of the local population on the island of Korfu was to be encouraged by the promotion of the local bishopric to metropolis, which Alexios Komnenos initiated probably at this time. Charizánis, "Νικόλαος," 203.

<sup>652</sup> In the autumn of 1084, Alexios Komnenos had to recall the Venetians because of reports of an imminent Norman attack. See text below.

<sup>653</sup> Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Bünnemann, *Guiscard*, 155; Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 63; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 474; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 179.

<sup>654</sup> See text above. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to assume that Guiscard was forced to build the entire Norman fleet all over again. Only part of the fleet took part in the first expedition, and according to some indications, Guiscard had only merchant ships (*holkades*) destroyed on the eve of the battle of Dyrrachion, as the precious oared warships are not mentioned at all in this context. *Alexias*, IV.5.7. (p. 131). Moreover, the Norman duke still had the possibility of simply confiscating the needed vessels and incorporate them in military service. In this respect, Malaterra's testimony that the ships were gathered from all over "*Apulia, Calabria and Sicily*" is quite understandable. Malaterra, 589. Construction of new vessels would have required much more time for preparations, which Guiscard certainly did not have in the late summer of 1084.

According to William of Apulia, the Norman fleet which was tasked to safely transport the new expeditionary host to Epirus was made up of a total of 120 ships,<sup>655</sup> that is, by 30 vessels fewer than during the first expedition. However, contrary to recent claims,<sup>656</sup> only a maximum of twenty vessels out of this number were demonstrably oared warships,<sup>657</sup> the remainder consisted of civil merchant vessels adapted for military use, transport ships, including an unknown number of ships specialized for horse transport.<sup>658</sup> In August 1084, the port of Taranto became the gathering point of the entire fleet and host, as well as of the supplies for the expedition.<sup>659</sup> Information about the numerical strength of Guiscard's forces has not been preserved in any written source,<sup>660</sup> and since we do not know the exact ratios between transport vessels and special horse carriers, an approximate estimate is not possible, as in the case of the first Norman attack. Nevertheless, it is logical to assume that the number of Norman forces was certainly inferior to that of the first campaign, fluctuating

<sup>655</sup> *Gesta*, 244; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Stanton, "Power," 127; Bennett, "Naval Activity," 55; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178; Stanton, *Operations*, 55. Nicol erroneously argues that it was 150 ships. Nicol, *Venice*, 58. Apparently, he took this wrong figure from Chalandon. Chalandon, *Essai*, 91; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282.

<sup>656</sup> For example, Filíppou claims that the 120 ships mentioned above include only oared warships, which is downright absurd. See Filíppou, "Παράδοση," 140.

<sup>657</sup> This conclusion is drawn from the later division of the Norman oared warships into four squadrons of five vessels each. *Gesta*, 244; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158. Theotokis mistakenly believes that there were twenty-five of them. See Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178.

<sup>658</sup> Bünemann presumed that a large number of ships seems to have been provided to Guiscard by the city of Amalfi, thanks to which he was able to assemble 120 ships in such a short space of time. The motive of the Amalfitan merchants to make alliance with the Normans was not so much the fact that the city was in the Norman hands, but rather the rivalry with their biggest commercial competitors—the Venetians. See Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155.

<sup>659</sup> *Gesta*, 242; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155; Bennett, "Naval Activity," 55. Stanton believes it was Otranto, see Stanton, *Operations*, 55. There exists a great controversy about the gathering and starting point of the entire expedition due to various accounts in written sources. Malaterra states that the army and the fleet met in Otranto, which was the rallying point of Norman forces also in the spring of 1081. Malaterra, 589. Anna Komnene claims the same. *Alexias*, VI.5.3. (p. 176). Lupus Protospatharius believes that the starting point was Brindisi. Lupus Protospatharius, 46. Nevertheless, the most credible appears to be William of Apulia, who says that the host and the fleet gathered in Taranto. *Gesta*, 242. See also note 680.

<sup>660</sup> Savvídis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 63.

between 6000 and 15,000 men,<sup>661</sup> including about 600 knights.<sup>662</sup> Considering that Guiscard had just returned from a military expedition during which he “liberated” the pope Gregory VII and plundered Rome<sup>663</sup> and that most of the forces assembled in May 1084 was forced to disband upon his return to Apulia in July 1084,<sup>664</sup> the first and lower estimate is certainly more likely.

The commander-in-chief of this second attempt to seize the Byzantine territories in the Balkans was naturally Guiscard himself, but this time all his adult sons—Bohemund, Roger Borsa, Robert, and Guido—were to accompany him on the expedition.<sup>665</sup> Probably in the spring of 1085,<sup>666</sup> when the campaign was already in full swing, they were joined also by Guiscard’s wife Sikelgaita.<sup>667</sup> We do not know any further information about other participants in this campaign from among the ranks of the south Norman aristocracy, and although several counts and barons are mentioned here and there, the vast majority is not referred to by name or title. Only Guiscard’s closest relatives represent an exception—Geoffroi of Conversano, Guiscard’s nephew and the protagonist of the 1082/1083 rebellion, who was forced to take part in the expedition so that he could not organize another dangerous revolt in Guiscard’s absence;<sup>668</sup> Robert of

<sup>661</sup> Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 140–141, note 28. See also Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178–179.

<sup>662</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178–179.

<sup>663</sup> For a detailed description of these events, see Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 135–149. In this expedition, Guiscard’s host, including reinforcements sent by Guiscard’s brother Roger of Sicily, amounted to about 3000 cavalymen and 10,000 infantrymen. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 177–178.

<sup>664</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 154.

<sup>665</sup> Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 474; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178. The youngest Guido seems to have joined the expedition later, as he is specifically mentioned only in connection with the operations in the spring of 1085, see text below.

<sup>666</sup> See text below.

<sup>667</sup> This again indicates that, as in 1081, there were also Salernitan militias and Sikelgaita’s personal armed escort participating in the final phase of the expedition. See text above and also Orderic Vitalis, 30: “[Sikelgaita] *conuocatis parasitis suis cum reliquis Langobardis*,” and *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>668</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 32; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178. See text above.

Loritello, another Guiscard's nephew and supporter;<sup>669</sup> Guiscard's son-in-law, Odobonus (good-willed Odo) Marquis;<sup>670</sup> count Hugues Monoculus (one-eyed) of Chiaromonte;<sup>671</sup> and Guiscard's son-in-law, William of Grandmesnil.<sup>672</sup> Nevertheless, it can be assumed that, contrary to Anna Komnene's claims how Guiscard's bellicose Normans and fighters from abroad enthusiastically flocked under his banner in large numbers to participate in this expedition,<sup>673</sup> Guiscard's second attack against Byzantium was probably far from being as popular as his first expedition three years ago. The persuasive duke apparently promised his Apulian vassals<sup>674</sup> rich plunder and abundant material rewards, by which he eventually managed to convince those still hesitating.<sup>675</sup>

As the time factor was of the utmost importance, Robert Guiscard decided to send an armed vanguard unit to the coast of Epirus at the turn of August and September 1084, despite the fact that his main forces were still not fully assembled at the time and thus unable to sail off. Like in 1081, Bohemund was most likely in charge of the vanguard troop because

<sup>669</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 32; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155. Robert of Loritello, Guiscard's loyal and reliable vassal, stayed in southern Italy in 1081 to help Roger Borsa with the administration of Apulia and Calabria in Guiscard's absence. See text above. Yet, this time a question arises as to who Guiscard commissioned to manage the duchy in his absence, since Sikelgaita joined the expedition in the spring of 1085. It is possible that Gerard of Buonalbergo, the second guardian of Roger Borsa in 1081, became the administrator. See text above.

<sup>670</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 32; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155. We do not know much about Odobonus Marchisus (Marquis) and his kinship to Guiscard. He seems to have married one of Guiscard's lesser-known daughters (mentioned elsewhere also as Guiscard's sister) named Emma. The couple had two sons, William and Tancred, who both joined Bohemund in 1096 in the First Crusade. William was killed in the battle of Dorylaion, whereas Tancred later ruled in Antioch in Bohemund's absence and then after his death. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 253. See also Evelyn Jamison, "Some Notes on the *Anonymi Gesta Francorum*, with Special Reference to the Norman Contingent from South Italy and Sicily in the First Crusade" *Studies in French Language and Medieval Literature presented to Professor Mildred K. Pope* (Manchester, 1939), 195–196.

<sup>671</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 32. Chiaromonte lies in the south of Apulia (according to today's administrative division, in Lucania). Hugues' wife was Gimarga. After 1085, the count Hugues of Chiaromonte joined Bohemund's supporters in his succession disputes with younger brother Roger Borsa. He died shortly after 1101/1102. Ménager, "Inventaire," 295–296, 299, 301–302.

<sup>672</sup> Orderic Vitalis, 32; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155. See also note 143.

<sup>673</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.2. (p. 175).

<sup>674</sup> According to Malaterra, the main part of the host came in particular from Apulia. Malaterra, 589.

<sup>675</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 178.



he was the only one of Guiscard's sons (with the possible exception of Guido)<sup>676</sup> who had firsthand knowledge of the operational area and the necessary military experience.<sup>677</sup> Bohemund's naval squadron was apparently not very numerous and probably amounted only to a maximum of five to ten warships.<sup>678</sup> With the help of this force, Bohemund, as he had done in 1081, occupied Aulon after crossing the Otranto Strait. He then seized the port of Butrint lying opposite the island of Korfu.<sup>679</sup> Meanwhile, during September 1084, Guiscard transferred his entire fleet from Taranto to Brindisi, as with the coming end of the sailing season, the weather was expected to gradually deteriorate, and only the port of Brindisi provided

<sup>676</sup> Guido was also believed to have taken part in the first expedition in 1081, but no mention was made of his involvement during its course. See text above.

<sup>677</sup> Based on Anna Komnene's account (*Alexias*, VI.5.2. (p. 176)), some historians, starting with Chalandon, believe that Roger Borsa and Guido were the commanders of the Norman vanguard. See Chalandon, *Essai*, 92; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 63; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 179; Stanton, *Operations*, 55. However, as has been mentioned several times, a more credible source in this regard is the *Gesta* of William of Apulia, who explicitly claims that Roger Borsa crossed the Strait of Otranto with the main forces of the Norman host together with his father only in October 1084. In Epirus, these forces then joined the vanguard units, which were commanded by Guiscard's "another son." *Gesta*, 244: "*Aequore transvectis exercitus ille coivit quem ducis egregii servabat filius alter.*" If we exclude Guido, who according to Anna Komnene sailed off with Roger Borsa, only Robert and Bohemund can be considered. Given the inexperience of the younger Robert and the fact that Bohemund had already led the Norman reconnaissance force during the 1081 campaign and was familiar with not only Aulon, but also the entire Epirotic coast as far as Butrint, it is almost certain that he was the commander of the vanguard. Filíppou, "Παράδοση," 139. The reason why William of Apulia deliberately withholds Bohemund's name is the well-known fact that this historian dedicated his work directly to Roger Borsa. *Gesta*, 11; Eads, "Sichelgaita," 79; Albu, *Normans*, 110. In view of this fact, it is then more than understandable that any merits of Bohemund, who in the years before taking part in the First Crusade represented the main rival of his half-brother Roger Borsa, are omitted by William of Apulia.

<sup>678</sup> This premise is based on the fact that during the naval battle off Korfu at the end of November 1084 Bohemund directly commanded a squadron of five warships. See text below. At the same time, this number seems relatively small, and it can be assumed that units under his command earmarked for the creation of the foothold had received a stronger escort of at least ten ships. In a similar situation in 1081, Bohemund commanded up to fifteen ships (Malatera, 582), but it should be remembered that at the time the Norman fleet had a total of fifty oared warships, and Guiscard could afford to provide his son stronger naval support.

<sup>679</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.2. (p. 176); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155; Prinzing, "Epirus," 11.

better shelter and protection for his forces.<sup>680</sup> From here, the entire Norman expeditionary host sailed off in September or October 1084<sup>681</sup> southeast along the Apulian coast to Otranto, and from there it continued its voyage to the other side of the Otranto Strait. Subsequently, it arrived in Butrint via Aulon, where its advance was halted for the next two months (until November 1084) by severe stormy weather.<sup>682</sup>

The arrival of the Norman invasion fleet in October 1084 clearly caught the Byzantines off guard. On the one hand, they anticipated that the Normans would eventually come, but on the other, they did not expect Guiscard to be able to organize its departure so quickly and risk sailing at such an advanced time of the year. Only an absolute surprise explains the fact that the Byzantine fleet, commanded by Maurix and based on Korfu, did not take any action to stop the Norman ships.<sup>683</sup> Alexios Komnenos, who was in Constantinople at the time, was certainly taken aghast, too. Under the impression of the alarming news of Guiscard's return to Epirus, he immediately dispatched messengers to Venice, urging the Venetian doge to send a strong fleet to help him stem the Norman invasion.<sup>684</sup> Luckily for the emperor, the Venetians were again more than willing to

<sup>680</sup> *Gesta*, 242. See also Lupus Protospatharius, 46; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155–156. The Norman expeditionary army and navy gathered first in Taranto, then moved to Brindisi and from there sailed south to Otranto, from where it crossed the Strait of Otranto at its narrowest point. Only the route thus reconstructed unites the seemingly contradictory and chaotic testimonies of the period sources regarding the rally/departure point of the Norman fleet. Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 139–140. See also note 659.

<sup>681</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155–156; Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 55.

<sup>682</sup> *Gesta*, 244; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bobemond*, 22; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 173; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 156; Nicol, *Venice*, 58; Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 63–64; Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 55; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 475; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 179.

<sup>683</sup> Neither the Byzantine nor the south Italian Norman sources mention any sign of activity of the Byzantine fleet. In Maurix' defense, it should be reiterated that Guiscard's attempt to cross the Strait of Otranto took place after the end of the sailing season. Therefore, the Byzantine ships did not patrol the local waters and could not warn the Byzantine admiral in advance.

<sup>684</sup> *Alexios*, VI.5.4. (p. 176): “μεμαθηκῶς ὁ ἀντοκράτωρ [...] τοῖς Βενετικῶς διὰ γραμμάτων ἐξώτρυνε...”; Dölger, *Regesten*, 33, no. 1119; Chalandon, *Essai*, 92; Kislínger, “Notizen,” 142; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 156. Savvídís and Lounghis mistakenly date the dispatch of the envoy as early as September 1084. Savvídís, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 64; Lounghis, *Ambassadors*, 248. In contrast, Theotokis believes that the Venetian fleet was ready much earlier and that Alexios Komnenos, under the impression of rumors about Guiscard's preparations, had already asked the Venetians for help “some time during the summer,” see Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 179.

comply, but it took them at least a month and a half before their fleet was equipped to sail south to join the Byzantines off Korfu.<sup>685</sup> The total size of the Venetian fleet cannot be determined, but according to William of Apulia, it consisted of at least nine large oared warships (galleys),<sup>686</sup> a great number of smaller monoremes,<sup>687</sup> and an unknown number of supply vessels.<sup>688</sup> Its commander was the unnamed son of the Venetian doge Domenico Silvio.<sup>689</sup> It is also possible that the Byzantine emperor hastily sent reinforcements in the form of several warships from the capital to strengthen Maurix' fleet.<sup>690</sup> The rallying point of the combined Byzantine-Venetian fleet was the port of Pasara (*limēn Pasarōn*) on the east coast of Korfu.<sup>691</sup>

In late November 1084, the Norman ships were finally able to leave Butrint, and since Guiscard's goal was to make contact with the isolated garrison in the Korfu citadel and repel the Byzantine forces besieging it (not to engage in the fight with the Byzantine-Venetian fleet), the entire fleet anchored in the port of Kassiope on the northeast coast of the island,

<sup>685</sup>The response time of the Venetians in the summer of 1081 was similar (approximately two months). See text above. Interestingly enough, the Venetian fleet set sail at the same time when bad weather blocked off the Norman fleet in Butrint, making it possible that the Norman patrols spotted the Venetian ships sailing through the northern strait between the coasts of Korfu and Epirus. Large Venetian vessels with higher sides certainly navigated through the stormy waves better than the smaller Norman oared warships.

<sup>686</sup>*Gesta*, 244.

<sup>687</sup>*Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 177).

<sup>688</sup>When comparing these numbers with those of the Venetian fleet dispatched in the summer of 1081, the Venetians sent slightly fewer ships this time than three years ago (fourteen large galleys and forty-five transport vessels). See note 282. The reasons for this are open to discussion, but factors such as the advanced time of the year and the need for fast fitting-out of the combat fleet, or the fact that, this time, Byzantine ships were finally to join the Venetian fleet, undoubtedly played a role. It is also likely that the Venetians had precise information about the size of Guiscard's fleet and, in particular, the number of oared warships, which was expected to be at least half the size in 1081.

<sup>689</sup>Lupus Protospatharius, 46; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 156.

<sup>690</sup>*Alexias*, VI.5.4. (p. 176). See also Kislinger, "Notizen," 141.

<sup>691</sup>According to Anna Komnene, Venetian ships headed to *limēn Pasarōn* to join the Byzantine fleet. *Alexias*, VI.5.5. (p. 177); Chalandon, *Essai*, 92; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 155; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180; Malamut, *Îles*, vol. 1, 185. The exact location of this port has not been determined yet. Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 227. According to Kislinger's recent hypothesis, *limēn Pasarōn* may have been located in Gubi (or Gouvia) on the east coast of Korfu. Kislinger, "Notizen," 142. There is a small, enclosed bay forming a perfectly protected anchorage, lying practically in sight of the Korfu citadel.

where the Norman host quickly began to disembark.<sup>692</sup> It can be assumed that the Normans did not lose time and attacked the Byzantine besiegers. The Venetians and Maurix seem to have learned about the passage of the Norman fleet from Butrint to Korfu only when seeing that the Byzantine forces on the island were under attack. As the allies outnumbered the Normans only at sea (circa thirty to thirty-five oared warships, of which were nine large Venetian galleys, versus approximately twenty galleys of the Norman fleet), they decided to attack the Norman ships anchored in Kassiope instantly.<sup>693</sup> From preserved descriptions in contemporary sources, it can be assumed that the stronger Byzantine-Venetian fleet attempted only to block the Norman ships in port at first. The Normans, in turn, tried to break through the naval blockade, suffering significant, albeit not closely specified, losses during two such attempts in the course of three days.<sup>694</sup> Eventually, the Venetians deemed this demonstration of force sufficient for the Normans to retreat, and the entire Byzantine-Venetian fleet returned to its base in the port of Pasara,<sup>695</sup> where it apparently intended to spend the upcoming winter. The Venetian commander

<sup>692</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.5. (p. 177); Chalandon, *Essai*, 92; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 22; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 157; Böhm, *Flota*, 131; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 179. For the location of Kassiope, see note 174. Anna Komnene comments on Guiscard's move as offensive, saying that the duke intended to attack the Byzantine fleet. However, the mere fact that his ships anchored in Kassiope, out of sight of the Byzantine-Venetian fleet, separated by the entire northeastern part of the Korfu island, suggests rather a defensive nature of his action. If Guiscard really intended to attack, he would have sailed with the entire fleet south to the port of Pasara, where the enemy fleet was anchored. Lupus Protospatharius mistakenly refers to the port of Kassiope as an island, see Lupus Protospatharius, 46.

<sup>693</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.5. (p. 177); Stanton, *Operations*, 55. Böhm interprets the text of Anna Komnene, which hardly mentions any activity of Byzantine ships (apparently so as to avoid the personally unpleasant and embarrassing fact that the weaker Byzantine fleet actually operated under the command of the Venetians), that the Normans were attacked only by the Venetians alone. Böhm, *Flota*, 131. Similarly, Kislinger argues that the first attack was exclusively under the command of the Venetians, and only under the impression of its success did the Byzantine fleet join the second attack. Kislinger, "Notizen," 142.

<sup>694</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.5. (p. 177); Chalandon, *Essai*, 92; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 23; Filippou, "Παράδοση," 143; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 157; Nicol, *Venice*, 58; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180; Stanton, *Operations*, 56.

<sup>695</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.5. (p. 177); Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 157; Böhm, *Flota*, 132.

even dispatched a few of his smaller and faster oared ships to Venice to bring the joyous news to Domenico Silvio.<sup>696</sup>

However, Guiscard did not feel defeated yet, although the apparent dominance of the Byzantine-Venetian fleet must have been frustrating. At this point, Norman's luck took a turn for the better, as a Venetian deserter named Pietro Contarini<sup>697</sup> informed the Norman duke about the departure of part of the Venetian fleet to Venice.<sup>698</sup> So once again, the Norman duke plucked up his courage and divided his twenty oared warships into four squadrons by five ships, with the first one being under his personal command, while the others led by his sons Bohemund, Roger Borsa, and Robert.<sup>699</sup> In the upcoming battle, each squadron was to operate independently. The reorganized Norman fleet set off toward the Venetian and Byzantine base in Pasara. However, the Normans eventually lost the element of surprise, as the vigilant Venetians and the Byzantines spotted them approaching. The Byzantines were able to prepare their ships in time, and when the Norman ships got within a striking distance, they were already ready for combat.<sup>700</sup>

In the forthcoming encounter, the Venetians opted for the same defensive tactic that won the day for them in August 1081—they tied their large

<sup>696</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.6. (p. 177); Chalandon, *Essai*, 92; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 23; Filippou, "Παράδοση," 143; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 157; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 64; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180. Another reason for sending smaller units to Venice at this moment was possibly the concern of the Venetian commander about their survival in harsh winter conditions; he probably thought they will be much better protected in the Venetian arsenals. Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 130.

<sup>697</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.6. (p. 177); Filippou, "Παράδοση," 143. The Contarinis were one of the most important Venetian families. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180. It is possible to assume that the assistance to the Normans by the alleged member of the Contarini house was in some way related to the fact that Domenico Contarini (1043–1071), the first doge originating from this family, was a direct predecessor of Domenico Silvio. Therefore, the treacherous conduct of Pietro Contarini could represent a sign of ongoing relentless power struggle between the Contarinis and Silvios in Venice.

<sup>698</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.6. (p. 177).

<sup>699</sup> *Gesta*, 244; Filippou, "Παράδοση," 143; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 475; Böhm, *Flota*, 132; Stanton, *Operations*, 56.

<sup>700</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.6. (p. 177). Romuald of Salerno also briefly reports on the battle, but does not give any specific details and, besides Guiscard, also highly praises Roger Borsa's actions. Romualdus, 175.

ships with ropes into a kind of floating platform (*pelagolimēn*).<sup>701</sup> Gaps in the Venetian formation were filled by smaller Byzantine dromons/chelandia.<sup>702</sup> At first, the fight followed a similar course as three years ago at Dyrrachion, where the higher gunwales of the Venetian ships gave the Venetians a clear advantage over the attacking Normans, whose ships were smaller and their decks much lower. The Venetians once again showered the Normans with hails of missiles, stones, and various large spiked iron bars.<sup>703</sup> The initial attack seems to have been led by the squadron under the command of Roger Borsa, who was hit by an arrow into his shoulder at this stage of the battle, and all men aboard his flagship seem to have suffered a minor or major injury likewise.<sup>704</sup> At this point, Guiscard decided to alter his strategy and ordered his sons (or Roger only) to concentrate their onslaught on smaller Byzantine vessels so as to separate them from the bigger Venetian galleys.<sup>705</sup> Because of this change, the Byzantines did not only fail to withstand the Norman pressure, but even began to retreat.<sup>706</sup> Nine Venetian great galleys remained in tenacious defense on the waves, which, despite being abandoned by the Byzantine ships, represented still a pretty tough nut for the Normans to crack. In the end, the Normans were greatly helped by the fact that after some time the Venetians were running out of “ammunition” and their ships, deprived of the weight which also served as ballast, were becoming dangerously top-heavy on the waves.<sup>707</sup> As a result, seven Venetian galleys soon capsized and sank with their entire crews, whereas two surviving galleys were

<sup>701</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.6. (p. 177); Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 131; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 143; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 157; Böhm, *Flota*, 132; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 180; Stanton, *Operations*, 57.

<sup>702</sup> *Gesta*, 244; Böhm, *Flota*, 132. According to Anna Komnene, the Venetians placed smaller vessels (apparently also the Byzantine dromons, or Venetian smaller support vessels) inside their defensive formation. *Alexias*, VI.5.6. (p. 177). In that case, however, the Byzantine ships would not have been able to leave this tight formation, which they later did when they started to escape.

<sup>703</sup> *Gesta*, 244; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 144; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 476; Böhm, *Flota*, 132. Bennett concluded mistakenly that it was the Normans who showered the Venetians with a very effective archery fire. See Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 55.

<sup>704</sup> *Gesta*, 244; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 476; Böhm, *Flota*, 132.

<sup>705</sup> *Gesta*, 246; Böhm, *Flota*, 133; Stanton, *Operations*, 56.

<sup>706</sup> *Gesta*, 246; Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 131; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 144; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158.

<sup>707</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.7. (p. 178); Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 144; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158; Böhm, *Flota*, 132.

captured. The Normans also managed to seize seven Byzantine dromons<sup>708</sup> and detained a great number of prisoners from among the Venetian and Byzantine sailors. These were probably later sent to Aulon.<sup>709</sup> The combined Byzantine-Venetian fleet thus suffered both heavy material and human losses<sup>710</sup> and basically lost its combat ability.

After this spectacular and rather unexpected success, which the defeat of the strongest naval power in the Mediterranean by the relatively inexperienced Norman fleet undoubtedly was,<sup>711</sup> Guiscard could finally begin to think in earnest about regaining the control of the island of Korfu<sup>712</sup> and then about a suitable location where he could spend the harsh Epirotic winter with his forces. Once Korfu was securely in the hands of the Normans, their entire fleet, as well as infantry, retired to the winter camp located near the mouth of the Glykys river. The Norman cavalry headed by the duke and his sons wintered in the port of Bonditza on the south

<sup>708</sup> *Gesta*, 246. Lupus Protospatharius claims that five Venetian ships were captured, and only two sank, see Lupus Protospatharius, 46; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 181.

<sup>709</sup> Guiscard treated the captured Byzantine sailors with unusual cruelty. As for the Venetians, he mostly spared them in an effort to use them later when negotiating a separate peace with the Venetians. Nevertheless, they refused to comply. *Alexias*, VI.5.8. (p. 178); Böhm, *Flota*, 133; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158–159.

<sup>710</sup> According to Anna Komnene, up to 13,000 Venetians died in the battle, and a large number of them fell into captivity. *Alexias*, VI.5.8. (p. 178); Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282. Lupus Protospatharius reports a more sober figure of 5000 dead. Lupus Protospatharius, 46. William of Apulia gives a testimony of a large number of killed and 2500 captured adversaries. *Gesta*, 246; Böhm, *Flota*, 133; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 144; Nicol, *Venice*, 58; Bennett, “Naval Activity,” 55; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 181. Undoubtedly, all these figures are exaggerated (although the figure offered by Lupus Protospatharius seems to be the most realistic), and the real losses among the Venetians and the Byzantines probably accounted to about a tenth of the number. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 158.

<sup>711</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 64–65. A very brief reference to Guiscard’s victory over the Venetians was also provided by William of Malmesbury in his chronicle *Gesta regum Anglorum* from the twelfth century. See William of Malmesbury, *A History of the Norman Kings (1066–1125)*, transl. by Joseph Stephenson (Dyfed: Llanerch Enterprises, 1989), 35.

<sup>712</sup> *Gesta*, 246; Chalandon, *Essai*, 93; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 23; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 145; Prinzing, “Epirus,” 11; Savvidis, *Επτάνησα*, 22–23; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 181. By conquering the island, Guiscard finally ensured the control of both ends of the vital communication and supply lines between southern Italy and the coast of Epirus. Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159.

coast of the Ambracian Gulf,<sup>713</sup> already known to the Normans from the first expedition in 1081. Again, as in 1081, wintering in the camp on the coast of Epirus, afflicted by cold weather and high humidity, was not a simple matter. Due to primitive hygiene conditions, lack of basic food supplies, and freezing cold,<sup>714</sup> the “plague” epidemic (most likely typhus) soon broke out among malnourished and constantly freezing Normans in both camps,<sup>715</sup> claiming a large number of lives not only among the rank-and-file soldiers but also among the Norman nobility. Both William of Apulia and Anna Komnene states that within three months (approximately by the beginning of April 1085) up to 10,000 men died in the Glykys river encampment, to which an additional number of 500 dead knights in Bonditza had to be added.<sup>716</sup> Even Bohemund was affected by this epidemic and thus had to ask his father for permission to return to the more benign climate of Mezzogiorno, which Guiscard allegedly granted to him with a heavy heart.<sup>717</sup> However, despite these difficulties, the Apulian duke steadfastly continued to implement his strategic plan. The next step after the occupation of Korfu was a daring strike southward along the Epirotic coast to the gulfs of Patras and Corinth, where an enticing and rich prey awaited the Norman attackers in the form of poorly defended, but economically flourishing and affluent cities of central Greece (Corinth, Athens, and Thebes).<sup>718</sup>

Unfortunately, the nature of response in Constantinople to the news of the heavy defeat of the Byzantine-Venetian fleet and Alexios Komnenos’

<sup>713</sup> *Gesta*, 246; *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 125); Chalandon, *Essai*, 93; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 145; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 143; Prinzing, “Epirus,” 11; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 65; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 181. The above-mentioned fact that Anna Komnene erroneously placed these events in the description of winter 1081/1082 should be recalled here. See text above.

<sup>714</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 125); *Gesta*, 246, 248.

<sup>715</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159.

<sup>716</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.2. (p. 125); *Gesta*, 248; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 23; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 145; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 476–477; Loud, *Guiscard*, 222; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 181.

<sup>717</sup> *Gesta*, 248; Chalandon, *Essai*, 93; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 23; Böhm, *Flota*, 134; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 145; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159; Nicol, *Venice*, 59; Prinzing, “Epirus,” 11; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 65; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 181.

<sup>718</sup> Angold, *Empire*, 129; Savvidis, *Επτάνησα*, 23; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 66; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 182.



immediate reaction is unknown.<sup>719</sup> However, based on the suspicious lack of information from Anna Komnene, it can be concluded *ex silentio* that the surviving ships of the Byzantine fleet were in full retreat and did not dare (or rather were unable) to intervene against the Normans for the rest of the year 1085. It is very likely that they sailed directly back to Constantinople. In Venice, however, the same disturbing news had an immediate and palpable impact—due to his son’s fiasco as the commander of the fleet, Domenico Silvio was forced to resign and Vitale Falier was elected as the new Venetian doge in his stead.<sup>720</sup> Fortunately for the Byzantines, the Norman victory sparked a strong desire for retribution among the Venetians, and so in the first months of 1085, they were intensely devoted to the launching of the new warfleet, whose role was to return the disgraceful defeat to the Normans as soon as possible.

In the meantime, however, Guiscard was enjoying complete freedom of movement and nothing prevented him from implementing his ambitious plans. He took first steps in early April 1085, when he sent his son Roger Borsa with a small squadron to occupy the island of Kefalonia.<sup>721</sup> The location of the island near the mouth of the Gulf of Patras made it a

<sup>719</sup> Anna Komnene, our only source, is silent in this regard, probably so as not to let this failure negatively affect the heroic image of her father, which she systematically tries to evoke throughout her work.

<sup>720</sup> Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 131. After his deposition, Domenico Silvio was sent off to a monastery. Vitale Falier (1084–1096) immediately dispatched a delegation of three messengers to Constantinople, and Alexios Komnenos, grateful for the fighting spirit of the new doge, bestowed a senior court title of *prōtosebastos*, as well as sovereignty over the northern part of Dalmatia on him (as before on his less fortunate predecessor). Andrea Dandolo, *Venetorum ducis chronicon Venetum*, ed. by L. A. Muratori, RISS XII (Milano: Mediolani, 1728), 249–250; Nicol, *Venice*, 58–59, 63. The accommodating acts of the Byzantine emperor undoubtedly were to strengthen the alliance with the Venetians and reward their determination to continue, despite the defeat, in the fight against the Normans.

<sup>721</sup> *Gesta*, 248; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282; Yewdale, *Bobemond*, 23; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 146; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 477; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 159; Loud, *Guiscard*, 222.

strategically important base for Normans for further military operations.<sup>722</sup> Roger landed in Kefalonia and began to besiege its main fortified center (*kastron*) Hagios Georgios.<sup>723</sup> Subsequently, Guiscard decided to move his entire fleet from the wintering camp, where many of his men died due to the plague epidemic and harsh weather, to a more suitable place. His intention was almost immediately undone by the elements of nature itself. Because of the extremely dry spring months<sup>724</sup> the water level in the Glykys river estuary (where the entire Norman fleet was anchored) dropped so much that the ships were now resting with keels on the bottom and could not be navigated out to sea.<sup>725</sup> However, the Norman duke did not let this obstacle stop him. On the opposite, he showed extraordinary shrewdness and intelligence and, using fascines of wood, clay, and sand, barred the course of the river at one point by a temporary dam. Subsequently, a kind of artificial lake was formed, thanks to which the water level in the river rose to the standard level, and the ships could float on the waves again.<sup>726</sup> During this time-consuming and delicate operation, the disquieting news of the death of his ally and protector, the pope Gregory VII (25 May

<sup>722</sup> As the main administrative center of the maritime province of Nikopolis and Kefalonia (*thema Nikopoleōs kai Kafallēnias*), the island of Kefalonia was an important objective, as well as an ideal base for operations deeper into the Gulf of Patras. Malamut, *Íles*, vol. 1, 307–309; Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 146. Its strategic position would allow the Normans to protect their maritime routes from southern Italy and at the same time significantly complicate any offensive moves by the Venetian and Byzantine naval forces. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 182. For an inception and historical overview of the history of the maritime province with the center in Kefalonia, see Christos Tsatsoulis, “Some Remarks on the Date of Creation and the Role of the Maritime Theme of Cephalonia (End of the 7th–11th Century),” *SBS* 11 (2012): 153–172.

<sup>723</sup> *Gesta*, 248; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 144; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 160; Prinzing, “Epirus,” 11; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 66; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 182; Malamut, *Íles*, vol. 1, 187. Hagios Georgios is located about seven kilometers south of the present town of Argostoli on the top of the hill (320 meters above sea level). Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 154–155. See also Zakythinós, “Κεφαλληνία,” 186 ff.

<sup>724</sup> Anna Komnene and William of Apulia claim that the water level decreased significantly due to severe summer drought. However, the latter further says that at the time Guiscard was trying to get his fleet out to sea, the pope Gregory VII died in Salerno. Since we know the date of his death from reliable historical sources (25 May 1085), we can also date Guiscard’s attempts to free his ships from the dry river mouth. The same conclusion was reached by Filíppou. Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 146.

<sup>725</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.3. (p. 125); *Gesta*, 248; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 143; Stanton, *Operations*, 57–58.

<sup>726</sup> *Alexias*, IV.3.3. (p. 125); *Gesta*, 248, 250; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 160; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 477; Loud, *Guiscard*, 222.

1085), reached the Norman duke.<sup>727</sup> When all the ships were successfully taken out to sea, Guiscard sailed off with his entire fleet to the port of Bonditza.<sup>728</sup>

It is possible that the unsettling news from southern Italy was brought personally to Guiscard by his wife Sikelgaita, whose appearance in Epirus in the spring of 1085<sup>729</sup> is also likely to signal the arrival of other unspecified reinforcements for Guiscard's invasion host.<sup>730</sup> Upon her arrival, Sikelgaita chose to stay in Butrint, opposite the island of Korfu, where her youngest son Guido was probably in charge of the local Norman garrison. She was apparently about to resume her journey further south when the port and the Norman fleet anchored there were surprisingly attacked by the Venetians. Hungry for revenge, the Venetians inflicted significant losses upon the Normans in Butrint, as Anna Komnene reports. Moreover, they nearly managed to capture Sikelgaita and Guido.<sup>731</sup> Although Norman forces in Butrint were badly mauled as a result of the Venetian sea raid, all in all, this event had no immediate impact on Guiscard's offensive plans, as the main part of his host and fleet was located in Bonditza at the time. Nevertheless, perhaps because of this news, the Norman duke decided it was necessary to speed up the conquest of Kefalonia. Thus, in early July 1085 he sailed swiftly aboard a fast galley from Bonditza to the island to

<sup>727</sup> *Gesta*, 250; Lupus Protospatharius, 46; Romualdus, 175; Diaconus, 793; Malaterra, 589; Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 290; Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 149; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 477.

<sup>728</sup> *Alexias*, VI.6.1. (p. 179).

<sup>729</sup> This timeline is based on the testimony of William of Apulia, who notes about Sikelgaita, when describing the scene of Guiscard's death in Kefalonia in July 1085, that she “*had come from Italy not long before.*” *Gesta*, 252: “*Uxor ab Italia non multo venerat ante.*”

<sup>730</sup> As mentioned above in connection with the composition of the Norman host before the first expedition in 1081, the presence of the Salernitan princess Sikelgaita almost certainly indicates the presence of her military entourage composed of the units of the principality of Salerno. See note 667.

<sup>731</sup> *Alexias*, VI.5.9. (p. 178); Manfroni, *Marina italiana*, 131; Böhm, *Flota*, 134; Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 147; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 476. The dating of this event by Böhm and Kislínger to the winter months of 1085 is completely flawed. It is possible to suggest that both scholars probably meant 1084, but in this case their assumption would not be correct either, because the Venetians suffered the aforementioned defeat at the time (November/December 1084), and it was entirely impossible to organize and equip a new fleet in Venice by the end of 1084, which, moreover, would have to sail to the port of Bonditza in stormy winter weather(!). Kislínger is inclined to a dating before the end of 1084. See Kislínger, “Notizen,” 143. More correct is the assumption that the Venetians attacked the Normans sometime in the spring of 1085, as Filíppou suggests. Filíppou, “Παράδοση,” 148–149.

assist Roger Borsa in this attack. However, during the voyage, the Norman duke was struck by an unknown fever, again probably typhus.<sup>732</sup> When the duke landed in a small and remote fishing port in northern Kefalonia, which is until nowadays known as Fiskardo,<sup>733</sup> on 11 July 1085, he was already gravely ill and plagued by a violent fever. Upon hearing the news of his sudden outburst of sickness, Sikelgaita left for Kefalonia, probably together with Robert and Guido, accompanied by other close family members.<sup>734</sup> However, the duke's health was deteriorating quickly as constantly high fevers were exhausting him. Finally, on 17 July 1085, six days after his arrival in Kefalonia, Robert of Hauteville, the intrepid duke of Apulia and Calabria, lying on his deathbed, confessed his sins, received the last rites, and departed his earthly existence.<sup>735</sup>

<sup>732</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 162. Other diseases that may have been the cause of the Norman duke's death are malaria or dysentery. Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 183; Taviani Carozzi, *Terreur*, 480. In this context, it is interesting to mention that the later Anglo-Norman chroniclers Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury attributed Guiscard's death to the poisoner art of his wife Sikelgaita, who in this way ended, from her point of view, a dead-end attack on Byzantium and definitively secured succession on the ducal throne to her son Roger Borsa. After returning to southern Italy, she allegedly also tried to poison Bohemund, but unsuccessfully. See Orderic Vitalis, 30, 32; William of Malmesbury, 35.

<sup>733</sup> Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 162; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 182. The original name of this port lying on the Erisos peninsula was Panormos since the late ancient times. Since the twelfth century at the latest, it became known as *Portus Wiscardi* (or variations of that name, such as *porto Fiscardo*, *porto Guiscardo*, *porto Viscardo*, *porto Biscardo*), from which its current name Fiskardo is derived. Zakythinós, “Κεφαλληνία,” 200–201; Soustal and Koder, *Nikopolis*, 234; Malamut, *Îles*, vol. 1, 187. This strong local tradition provides substantial evidence that Guiscard indeed died there on 17 July 1085. Interestingly, the Norman chroniclers do not specify the location of Guiscard's death on the island. Anna Komnene claims that he landed on Cape Atheras, which makes Chalandon believe that he died there. *Alexias*, VI.6.1. (p. 179); Chalandon, *Domination normande*, 282. However, from this place, the duke would not be able to observe the island of Ithaki lying directly opposite, because the direct view would be obscured by the Erisos peninsula, where the aforementioned port of Fiskardo is located. See also Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 67.

<sup>734</sup> According to Orderic Vitalis, Guiscard's nephews Geoffroi of Conversano and Robert of Loritello were present at his deathbed, as were his son-in-law Odobonus Marquis, Count Hugo Monoculus of Chiaromonte, and his son-in-law William of Grandmesnil. Orderic Vitalis, 32; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 160.

<sup>735</sup> Diaconus, 793; Malaterra, 589; Chalandon, *Essai*, 93; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 23; Savvidis, *Επτάνησα*, 23; Kislinger, “Notizen,” 144; Filippou, “Παράδοση,” 149; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 173; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 162; Prinzing, “Epirus,” 11; Loud, *Guiscard*, 223.

Guiscard's sudden demise marked the definite end of his ambitious project of military conquest.<sup>736</sup> Roger Borsa clearly did not have enough authority or personal charisma to take command of the host and continue in the campaign. Moreover, the issue of heirloom after Guiscard in Apulia and Calabria itself was of utmost importance for him and his mother Sikelgaita at this crucial moment. Thus, having made a short stop in Bonditza (much of the Norman host was still staying there waiting for orders),<sup>737</sup> Roger and his mother opted to return to Apulia without too much delay (as soon as they have ensured the transport of Guiscard's mortal remains).<sup>738</sup> They abandoned Norman rank-and-file soldiers and barons there, many of whom later tried to reach southern Italy on their own.<sup>739</sup> Similar confusion arose among Norman garrisons in Bonditza, Butrint, Korfu, and Dyrrachion. Many of their members tried to get on board of Norman ships heading to Apulia as soon as possible, but since only some managed to do so (after the news of Guiscard's death, the largest vessels were in panic set on fire so as not to fall into the Byzantine hands), most of the Norman soldiers eventually laid down their weapons and later joined the service of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>740</sup> Moreover, plain sailing of the confused Norman fleet was complicated as some ships went down in a sudden summer storm, sinking with almost entire crews and passengers on board.<sup>741</sup> The same fate nearly befell to the vessel carrying Robert Guiscard's bodily remains—the storm and high waves caused such damage that the Guiscard's coffin was almost washed out from the deck through a crack in the broken gunwale. Only with great difficulty were the sailors able to pull it back on board.<sup>742</sup> The coffin was then transported without further complications to Otranto and from there to

<sup>736</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 100.

<sup>737</sup> *Gesta*, 254; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 162.

<sup>738</sup> *Alexias*, VI.6.3. (p. 180); *Gesta*, 254; Yewdale, *Bohemond*, 24; Savvidis, *Επὶ ἄνθησα*, 27; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 183. Roger's return to southern Italy was all the more urgent because his older half-brother and main power rival Bohemund was already present there (he was recovering there after a previous illness). Loud, *Guiscard*, 223; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 163.

<sup>739</sup> Prinzing, "Epirus," 12.

<sup>740</sup> *Gesta*, 256; Prinzing, "Epirus," 12; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 68. The most prominent Norman "defector" was Guiscard's own son Guido, who became the founder of the Byzantine-Norman family of the Guidoi. Cheynet, "Occidentaux," 124.

<sup>741</sup> *Alexias*, VI.6.3. (p. 180); *Gesta*, 256, 258.

<sup>742</sup> *Alexias*, VI.6.3. (p. 180); *Gesta*, 258; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 163.

Venosa, where Sikelgaita was finally able to organize a proper funeral ceremony for her deceased husband.<sup>743</sup>

News of Guiscard's sudden death and subsequent abrupt collapse of his second expedition to the territories of the Byzantine Empire in the Balkans must have sparked inexpressible joy and relief at the imperial court in Constantinople.<sup>744</sup> In this way, Alexios Komnenos finally overpowered his opponent, although it is impossible to estimate what would have happened had the Norman duke not died and continued to implement his ambitious plans. There was one last important task left for the Byzantine emperor, though—to regain control of Dyrrachion, which had been in the Norman hands since 21 February 1082.<sup>745</sup> Alexios Komnenos once again resorted to the use of diplomacy and through letters and promises of high financial rewards was able to persuade the Norman garrison, with the help of the Amalfitans, to hand over the city to imperial envoys.<sup>746</sup> The surrender of the Dyrrachion's citadel, supervised by the Venetians<sup>747</sup> in the late autumn of 1085,<sup>748</sup> constituted a definite end to the devastating and exhaustive military conflict that Alexios Komnenos had to face from the very first moments of his rule.

<sup>743</sup> *Alexias*, VI.6.3. (p. 180); *Gesta*, 258; Malaterra, 589; Diaconus, 793; Prinzing, "Epirus," 12; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 163.

<sup>744</sup> Malaterra, 589. Notwithstanding the fact that Anna Komnene included a casual note in her text about an astrologer and prophet named Seth, who supposedly predicted Guiscard's death. *Alexias*, VI.7.1. (p. 181); Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 67.

<sup>745</sup> See text above.

<sup>746</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, 34, no. 1125. There is also a possibility, based on a much later mention in the chronicle of the fourteenth-century Venetian Andrea Dandolo, that Dyrrachion was for a short time controlled by Mihailo, the Serbian ruler of Zeta and Raška (which is evidently wrong information because Mihailo died around 1081, so it must have been his son Constantine Bodin), and only then he handed it over to the Byzantine emperor. Dandolo, 252; Kislinger, "Notizen," 145; Fine, *Balkans*, 223. The emperor's other brother-in-law *sebastos* John Doukas (older brother of the emperor's wife Eirene Doukaina) became the new Byzantine commander of the just-acquired Dyrrachion, as well as the entire province, and remained in this position until 1091. Stephenson, *Frontier*, 173; Kühn, *Armee*, 239. For a more detailed description of his life career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 145–150.

<sup>747</sup> Dölger, *Regesten*, 34, no. 1126.

<sup>748</sup> Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 183–184; Savvidis, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 68.



## CHAPTER 5

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# War Against the Pechenegs (1083–1091)

The most tangible result of the Byzantine victory over the Normans was that Alexios Komnenos was able to secure the strategically important space of the Western Balkans against both internal and external adversaries for several future decades. Unfortunately, the Normans were not the only enemies jeopardizing *Pax Byzantina* in the Balkan provinces. It was also the Pechenegs, a nomadic tribe living in the territory of the Byzantine province (*thema*) of Paradounavon, who had posed further serious threat

since the 1050s.<sup>1</sup> Although the historical work of Anna Komnene can give the impression that Alexios Komnenos successfully completed the war against the Normans in 1085 and only in the spring of 1086 did he start to deal with the “sudden” threat from the Pechenegs, the war against them began much earlier and much more inconspicuously.<sup>2</sup> This conflict was very different in many respects from the war against the Normans,

<sup>1</sup>The Pechenegs were a nomadic tribe that played a role of an important ally of the Byzantines on the Pontic steppe since the end of the ninth century. They have become Byzantium’s troublesome neighbors on the lower Danube after 1025 (see text below). There is no room to reiterate the relationship between Byzantium and the Pechenegs here in full, or to present the historiography covering this interesting topic in its entirety. Fortunately, this work has been very recently carried out in much detail by M. Melnyk. See Mykola Melnyk, *Byzantium and the Pechenegs. The Historiography of the Problem* (Leiden: Brill, 2022). The Byzantine province of Paradounavon (or Paristrion) was established around 1000 in the area of present-day northern Bulgaria and Romanian Dobrudja between the lower Danube and the Haimos mountains (Stara Planina). Its western border probably passed through the town of Vidin and reached the Black Sea coast in the east. Its military commander (*stratēgos*, later *doux*) was stationed in the city of Dristra (now Silistra, Bulgaria). Since the administrative reforms of Basileios II in the 1020s, or since Constantine IX Monomach’s reforms in the 1040s, the province was officially named Paradounavon and geographically called in written sources Paristrion. Kühn, *Armee*, 223–226; Alexandru Madgearu, “The Military Organisation of Paradounavon,” *BSI* 60, no. 2 (1999): 421–446; Alexandru Madgearu, *Organizarea militară bizantină la Dunăre în secolele X-XII* (Târgoviște: Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, 2007), 101–118; Alexandru Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube, 10th–12th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova, “L’administration byzantine au Bas Danube (fin du X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> s.),” *BSI* 54 (1993): 95–101; Eugen Stănescu, “Beiträge zur Paristrion Frage. Die Benennungen der unteren Donauegebiete im 10. bis 12. Jahrhundert als historisches Problem,” *JÖB* 17 (1968): 41–64; Marek Meško, “Vývin obranného systému Byzantskej ríše v 11. storočí – príklad témy Paradounavon,” *Byzantinoslovaca* I (2006): 128–143; Bojana Kršmanović, *The Byzantine Province in Change: (On the Treshold between the 10th and the 11th Century)* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Institute for Byzantine Studies, 2008), 194–198.

<sup>2</sup>Anna Komnene begins her description of the war against the Pechenegs only after the narration of the war against the Normans, which ends with Guiscard’s death on 17 July 1085. Moreover, the description of the war against the Pechenegs does not immediately follow the description of the Norman war, but in the meantime, Anna Komnene describes the struggles against the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor, which lasted until 1092. As a result, the order of events gives the impression that the Normans, Turks, and Pechenegs successively attacked the Byzantine Empire. This impression is reinforced by the diction of the opening sentence of the chapter on the war against the Pechenegs, “βουλομένη δὲ δεινοτέραν καὶ μείζονα τῆς προλαβούσης κατὰ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς ἔφοδον διηγῆσαι.” *Alexias*, VI.14.1 (p. 199). For reasons for this method of reporting historical events, see Howard-Johnston, “Alexiad,” 296–299.



and, as we will see below, it acquired its confrontational character only gradually and escalated up to the point when the actual existence of the Byzantine Empire was ultimately questioned. Yet, paradoxically, this war is much less known and discussed than the war against the Normans.

## 5.1 GEOGRAPHICAL SETTINGS

### 5.1.1 *Geography of the Northeastern Balkans*

For the purposes of this book, the northeastern Balkans will henceforth denote an area the northern boundary of which consists of the lower Danube from approximately the surroundings of the town of Vidin; the eastern as delineated by the Black Sea, the Bosphorus, the Marmara Sea, and the Dardanel; and the southern by the north Aegean coastland; and the western corresponding to the above definition of the area of military operations during the war against the Normans. The dominant feature of such a delimited area is the Stara Planina mountains (in Greek, the Haimos), known from the Byzantine written sources of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as *Zygos*,<sup>3</sup> dividing it into two basic geographical subdivisions—the long and narrow Danube plain, most of which is now located in Bulgaria (except for the northern part of Dobrudja, belonging to Romania), and the great Thracian plain, with the Maritsa river (in Greek, the Hebros) running through it, stretching across today's Bulgaria and Turkey.<sup>4</sup> The northern edge is lined with the course of the Danube river, which at the time of Alexios Komnenos' ascension to the throne theoretically represented the northern political boundary of the Byzantine Empire. In the Middle Ages, its lower watercourse was navigable along its entire length<sup>5</sup> and it could be forded at several points.<sup>6</sup> The main significance of

<sup>3</sup>For example, Michael Attaleiates and Anna Komnene use this name. See Attaleiates, 37; *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286).

<sup>4</sup>María Nystazopoúlou-Pelekíidou, “Οι Βαλκανικοί λαοί κατά τους μέσους χρόνους,” (Thessalonica: Ekdóseis Vánias, 1992), 17.

<sup>5</sup>Koder, *Γεωγραφία*, 28.

<sup>6</sup>One of those fords on the lower Danube was opposite Dervent in Dobrudja. Emil Condurachi, Ion Barnea, and Petre Diaconu, “Nouvelles recherches sur le limes byzantin du Bas-Danube aux X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles,” *Eight International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Oxford 5–10 September 1966* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 190; Diaconu, “Păcuil lui Soare – Vicina,” *Byzantina* 8 (1976): 416. It was also possible to cross the Danube near today's Garvăn and Issacea. Madgearu, *Organization*, 109.

the Danube plain in military terms was its openness—there were no natural obstacles hindering the movement of large armies or enabling the construction of more permanent defensive positions. The only exception was the area around the towns of Pliska and Preslav with vast marshes, watered and muddy soil, as well as densely forested areas,<sup>7</sup> which were ideal for defensive tactics.

To the south of the Danube plain the majestic Haimos mountains rise, representing the southern extension of the main ridge of the Carpathian Arc, separated from it by a gorge on the Danube in the area known as the Iron Gates.<sup>8</sup> The total length of the Haimos mountain range is 444 kilometers. In the western part, the highest peak reaches 2376 meters above sea level, whereas in the eastern part, which begins with the Vratnik pass north of the town of Sliven, it does not exceed an altitude of 1000 meters above sea level.<sup>9</sup> Another characteristic feature of the Haimos mountains is that its northern slopes descend quite gently into the Danube plain, while the height differences on the south side are much more pronounced and slopes much steeper.<sup>10</sup> To the south of the main ridge there is a lateral and lower range called the Sărna Gora (highest peak reaching 1236 meters above sea level), separating the valley of the upper Tundzha river from the Upper Thracian Lowland (Gornotrakijaska nizina).<sup>11</sup> However, even the Haimos, which represented the true northern border of Byzantium during the early years of Alexios Komnenos' reign, was not an insurmountable obstacle for potential attackers. The main ridge could be traversed via several mountain passes,<sup>12</sup> in Byzantine sources called *kleisourai*,<sup>13</sup> which, however, could be blocked and defended. In the eleventh century, the most important crossing point of the western part of the Haimos was the Shipka (or Shipchenski) pass (1190 meters above sea level), whereas in the eastern part it was the Rishki pass (highest point only

<sup>7</sup> Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 125–126; Madgearu, *Organization*, 126.

<sup>8</sup> Koder, *Βυζάντιο*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Soustal, *Thrakien (Thrakē, Rhodopē und Haimimontos)*, TIB, Band 6 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 54; Nystazopoulou-Kleikidou, *Λαοί*, 19; Kyriazopoulos, *Θράκη*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Koder, *Γεωγραφία*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 279. If sufficient troops were available to the Byzantine emperors, the defense of these mountain passes was relatively simple and effective. Haldon, *Byzantium at War: AD 600–1453* (London: Osprey, 2002), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Attaleiates, 37.

416 meters above sea level), known to the Byzantines as *Sidēra*, located north of the present-day Bulgarian town of Karnobat.<sup>14</sup>

A large Thracian plain extends between the Haimos, the Rhodopes, and the Aegean Sea, divided into two smaller parts—the upper and the lower. The Upper Thracian plain has an average width of 40 kilometers, length of 160 kilometers, and average altitude of 168 meters.<sup>15</sup> Its landscape is characterized by even contours, as the distinctive hills are found only near Plovdiv (Philippoupolis) and Stara Zagora (Beroe).<sup>16</sup> The only major river running through the plain is the upper Maritsa river with its tributaries. The Lower Thracian plain stretches from the city of Edirne (Adrianoupolis) along the lower Maritsa river and the Rhodope mountains to the northern Aegean coastland. The Maritsa and its left-hand tributary the Ergene river (in Greek, Erginis) dominate this area. The landscape here is more varied, as there are also rounded hills with gentle slopes, but none of them exceeds an altitude of 200 meters above sea level.<sup>17</sup> This area generally did not represent any significant obstacle to the long-distance transport of goods and people (even if heavy four-wheeled wooden wagons were used), if traveling under favorable weather conditions. The same applies to the movement of allied or enemy troops. Once potential attackers traversed the Haimos mountains via one of its passes, or passed through a crossing called the Trajan's Gate near today's Sofia, they virtually had an open road all the way to the outskirts of Constantinople.<sup>18</sup> The only exception here is the Maritsa delta beginning south of the confluence of the Maritsa and the Ergene rivers, the maximum width of which does not exceed 12 kilometers. This practically impassable territory consists of two main arms of the Maritsa, between which there are a number of marshes, water bodies, and tiny islands.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Veselin Beševliev, "Die byzantinische Heerstrasse Adrianopel – Verigava," *Bulgarisch-byzantinische Aufsätze* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978), 127; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 141, 143, 441.

<sup>15</sup>Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 14.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Soustal, *Thrakien*, 55; Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 15.

<sup>18</sup>See Klaus Belke, "Roads and Travel in Macedonia and Thrace in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period," *Travel in the Byzantine World – Papers from the Thirty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, April 2000*, ed. by Ruth Macrides (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 79–82.

<sup>19</sup>Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 15.

A series of heights to the east of the Upper Thracian plain, extending along both banks of the lower Tundzha river, separates it from the Black Sea coast. On the right bank of the Tundzha, to the north, there are elevations known today as Svetilijski vāzvišenija, Monastirski vāzvišenija, and Sakar (in the case of the latter two with an altitude of up to 600 and 856 meters above sea level, respectively). The left bank of the Tundzha is lined with the heights of the Hissar and Bakardzicite, and Derventski vāzvišenija (with an altitude of 555 meters above sea level) and the Yıldız dağları (with a maximum altitude of up to 1031 meters above sea level), dominating the area of today's Bulgarian-Turkish border.<sup>20</sup> Although these elevations are interrupted in many places by valleys running both in the east-west and north-south directions, they do not seem to have been frequented by the Byzantine or other troops in the eleventh century. The main thoroughfare during this period was clearly the Thracian plain (including the Tundzha river valley).<sup>21</sup>

The southern boundary of the Thracian plain is formed by the Rhodope mountains. The main ridge of this imposing mountain range first runs from northwest to south, but later turns and continues in the eastern direction. Its overall length is 250 kilometers and width around 100 kilometers. Like the Haimos mountains, the Rhodopes are divided into the western and eastern parts, with the division line passing through Mount Papikion (1460 meters above sea level) at today's Bulgarian-Greek border.<sup>22</sup> The western part of the mountain range is characterized by a higher average altitude (the highest peak reaches 2924 meters above sea level), as well as steep mountain slopes, high plateau, and deep narrow valleys.<sup>23</sup> The eastern part is lower and consists of highlands and hills with an average altitude ranging between 400 and 1000 meters above sea level. It is drained by two right tributaries of the Maritsa river—the Arda and Erythrotamos rivers.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> See text below.

<sup>22</sup> Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 3–4.

<sup>23</sup> Nystazopoúlou-Pelekidou, *Λαοί*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 3, 8–12.

### 5.1.2 Road Network

The landscape of the Danube and Thracian plains with even contours enabled and greatly facilitated the emergence and development of a relatively sophisticated road network.<sup>25</sup> Another positive stimulus for its development was the relative proximity of Constantinople with its large mass of population, imperial court, aristocratic *oikoi*, and numerous monasteries. The Byzantine capital undoubtedly constituted the most important center of consumption of agricultural production and exchange of various goods throughout the area under discussion.<sup>26</sup> It was also the starting point of two principal roads—the *Via Militaris* (military road) and the *Via Egnatia*. The former linked Constantinople and Central Eastern Europe,<sup>27</sup> which, within the geographical area examined, passed through the cities of Tzouroulon (today's Çorlu),<sup>28</sup> Arkadioupolis (Lüleburgaz),<sup>29</sup> Boulgarofygon (Babaeski),<sup>30</sup> Adrianoupolis, Philippoupolis, and Sardike (today's Sofia). The *Via Egnatia* forked with the military road near Tzouroulon, running westward through the cities of Apros (Kermeyan),<sup>31</sup> Rousion (Rusköy),<sup>32</sup> and Kypsella (Ipsala)<sup>33</sup> all the way to Thessalonica from where it continued to Dyrrachion on the Adriatic coast.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Kyriazópoulos, *Θράκη*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> For more, see Paul Magdalino, “The Grain Supply of Constantinople, 9th to 12th Centuries,” *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. by Cyril Mango, Gilbert Dagron, and Geoffrey Greatrex (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 36–37.

<sup>27</sup> Koder, *Γεωγραφία*, 98; Belke, “Roads,” 73–74; Haldon, *Warfare*, 56; Haldon, *Πόλεμοι*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Asdracha, “La Thrace orientale et la Mer Noire: Géographie ecclésiastique et prosopographique (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles),” *Géographie historique du monde méditerranéen*, ed. by Hélène Ahrweiler (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), 255; Annie Pralong, “Remarques sur les fortifications byzantines de Thrace orientale,” *Géographie historique du monde méditerranéen*, 181; Andreas Külzer, *Ostthrakien (Euröpe)*, TIB, vol. 12 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008), 684–687.

<sup>29</sup> Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 264–267.

<sup>30</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 223; Asdracha, “Thrace,” 264.

<sup>31</sup> The exact location of this Byzantine city was unknown for a long time; it was assumed that it lay approximately 50 kilometers west of the present-day city of Tekirdağ (in the Byzantine period named Rhaidestos). Asdracha, “Thrace,” 235. However, Ananiev, and most recently Külzer, argues that Apros is today's Kermiyan. See Ananiev, “Byzantine Seals Found in the Republic of Macedonia,” *SBS* 7 (2002): 59; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 255–256.

<sup>32</sup> Asdracha, “Thrace,” 236. Village of Rusköy no longer exists. See Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 620–622.

<sup>33</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 330–331; Asdracha, “Thrace,” 237–238.

<sup>34</sup> Koder, *Γεωγραφία*, 98; Belke, “Roads,” 73; Haldon, *Warfare*, 54–55; Haldon, *Πόλεμοι*, 21. See also text and notes 28 and 31 in Chap. 4.

Of course, there were other communications linking the Byzantine capital to the areas lying in the north. The first followed the Black Sea coastline and led to the mouth of the Danube,<sup>35</sup> while the second, more significant, diverted at Adrianoupolis from the military road in the north-east direction and ran across the Derwent heights, via Markellai (near the present-day town of Karnobat)<sup>36</sup> and Goloe (not far from the town of Lozarevo)<sup>37</sup> and up to the *Sidēra* mountain pass. After crossing the Haimos mountains, this road continued through Preslav and Pliska to the most important city on the lower Danube—Dristra (today's Silistra).<sup>38</sup> Moreover, several alternative roads ran in parallel to the main route, such as the slightly more western one through the Tundzha river valley to the town of Diampolis (today's Jambol) and farther.<sup>39</sup> In addition to this main road network, which allowed the long-distance transport of merchant goods, raw materials, and persons, as well as transfer of military forces, we can assume the existence of a relatively dense network of local minor roads and pathways that served the needs of the peasant population in the short-distance transport of various goods and supplies,<sup>40</sup> which, however, played only a marginal role from a military point of view.

## 5.2 CHRONOLOGICAL SETTINGS

The chronological problems and inaccuracies peculiar to the historical work of the Byzantine princess Anna Komnene mentioned above in connection with the description of the war against the Normans apply likewise to her account related to the Pechenegs. Nevertheless, the *Alexiad* is practically the only relevant source of our knowledge of the sequence and dating of important events of the war against the Pechenegs.<sup>41</sup> Considering that the last serious attempt to systematically examine the credibility of

<sup>35</sup> Kyriazópoulos, *Θράκη*, 54; Haldon, *Warfare*, 56.

<sup>36</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 348–349.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 143, 271.

<sup>38</sup> This road also represented the shortest overland connection between Constantinople and Dristra. Beševliev, “Heerstrasse,” 126–127; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 143–144.

<sup>39</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 239–240.

<sup>40</sup> Koder, *Γεωγραφία*, 95.

<sup>41</sup> The determination of proper chronology is therefore much more complicated than it was in the case of the war against the Normans, where data from Anna Komnene could be confronted with information from Norman chroniclers, especially William of Apulia. See text above.

Anna Komnene's narration of these events was carried out more than a century ago by Karl Dieter,<sup>42</sup> I deem it necessary to address this issue in more detail.

### 5.2.1 *Fixed Dates*

When describing the military encounters with the Pechenegs, Anna Komnene provides information needed for accurate and unquestionable dating of important events in six cases only. The first can be found in the section depicting the reception of a 150-member group of the Pecheneg envoys by the emperor Alexios Komnenos in the military encampment near the town of Lardea. During the meeting, a solar eclipse occurred,<sup>43</sup> which, according to the prevailing opinion of historians, corresponds to the partial solar eclipse observable in the area of present-day northeastern Bulgaria on the morning of 1 August 1087.<sup>44</sup> This first fixed date is very important because it allows us to refine not only the chronology of Alexios Komnenos' entire military campaign against Dristra, but also all other

<sup>42</sup> See Karl Dieter, "Zur Glaubwürdigkeit der Anna Komnena," *Byz. Zeitsch.* 3 (1894): 386–390. The only exception is my article Marek Meško, "Notes sur la chronologie de la guerre des Byzantins contre les Petchénègues (1083–1091)," *BS/LXIX* (2011): 134–148, as well as Belke's study, which, however, focuses on events related to the encounters with the Seljuks in Asia Minor. See Klaus Belke, "Byzanz und die Anfänge des rumseldschukischen Staates. Bemerkungen zur Chronologie von Anna Komnēnēs *Alexias* in den Jahren 1084 bis 1093," *JÖB* 61 (2011): 65–79.

<sup>43</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.8. (p. 207–208).

<sup>44</sup> Dieter, "Glaubwürdigkeit," 388–389; Chalandon, *Essai*, 114. This hypothesis, based on purely astronomical knowledge, was challenged by D'Occhieppo, who believes that the eclipse occurred on 2 October 1084. See K. F. D'Occhieppo, "Zur Identifizierung der Sonnenfinsternis während des Petschenegenkrieges Alexios' I Komnenos (1084)," *JÖB* 23 (1974): 182–184. However, the solidly substantiated opinion of this author is difficult to defend from a historical point of view. For example, a widely based invasion of the Pechenegs led by Çelgü and with the participation of the former Hungarian King Solomon, which was unsuccessful and killed both of his leaders, would then have to take place in the spring of the same year. But according to reliable reports of the contemporary analysts Saxo and Bernold, King Solomon died in 1087. See Saxo Grammaticus, *Annalista Saxo*, MHG SS, VI (Leipzig, 1926), 724; Bernold, *Bernoldi chronicon*, MGH SS, V (Leipzig, 1926), 446. The date of 20 June 1088, proposed by Petre Diaconu, has no solid basis, and *de facto* is a wrongly reproduced date from Vasil'evskij, who argues that the day of the solar eclipse was 20 July 1088. See Petre Diaconu, *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube* (Bucarest: Académie de la République Socialiste de Roumanie, 1970), 117, and Vasil'evskij, "Византия и Печенеги," *ZhMNP* 164 (1872): 160. This last date must also be dismissed, since, according to more recent astronomical calculations, the solar eclipse of 20 July 1088 was not visible at all in the territory of present-day northeastern Bulgaria. See D'Occhieppo, "Sonnenfinsternis," 180.

events described at the end of Book VI<sup>45</sup> and the beginning of Book VII<sup>46</sup> (from the summer until the onset of winter of 1087). The five other fixed dates can be found in Book VIII and relate solely to events that took place in 1091. Thanks to Anna Komnene we know that Alexios Komnenos set off from Constantinople to lead a small military detachment to reinforce the defense of the Thracian town of Choirobakchoi on Friday, 14 February 1091,<sup>47</sup> that on the next day he fought successfully against the Pechenegs,<sup>48</sup> and that on Monday morning 17 February he returned to the capital.<sup>49</sup> However, the Byzantine success did not have lasting effects, as just a few weeks later, as Anna Komnene notes, groups of nomads appeared in close proximity to the Byzantine capital. Because of the Pecheneg raids, the inhabitants of Constantinople could not gather for worship of the relics of St Theodore Teron in a church located at Bathys Ryaks outside the city walls.<sup>50</sup> Anna Komnene's specific reference may indicate that this was not a year-round routine worshipping practice, but that the Pecheneg incursions reached their climax during his holiday, which is celebrated in the Orthodox Church on the first Saturday of the Easter Lent. In 1091, this day fell on 8 March. Therefore, the above-mentioned events can be dated to early March.<sup>51</sup> Finally, still in line with the information of Anna Komnene, the last military campaign of the war against the Pechenegs began on 23 March 1091, on the day of the spring equinox, when Alexios Komnenos sent *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos to the town of Ainos.<sup>52</sup> The

<sup>45</sup> Book VI depicts the Pecheneg invasion in the previous year (spring 1086), during which *meġas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos died, and the campaign of the Byzantine general Tatikios during the summer of the same year. See *Alexias*, VI.14.1–7 (p. 199–202). See also text below.

<sup>46</sup> Events from the beginning of the invasion of the Pechenegs under elgü's command in the spring of 1087 to the defeat of the Paradounavon Pechenegs by their former allies the Kumans during the autumn/winter of 1087. *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203–218).

<sup>47</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.1. (p. 236); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Paul Gautier, "Diatribes de Jean l' Oxite contre Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène," *REB* 28 (1970), 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Gautier, "Diatribes," 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.2.4. (p. 239); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 255; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Gautier, "Diatribes," 9. Dieter dates this short expedition against the Pechenegs to February 1090, that is, a year earlier. This assumption was not accepted by other researchers. See Dieter, "Glaubwürdigkeit," 390.

<sup>50</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.1. (p. 241).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 240; Chalandon, *Essai*, 129. Vasil'evskij provides a wrong date when he indicates 2 March 1091 as the day of the holiday. Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 255.

<sup>52</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.4. (p. 242).



last specific date mentioned in the *Alexiad* is Tuesday, 29 April 1091, the day of the decisive battle of Leboundion.<sup>53</sup> In addition to these few exact dates, Anna Komnene makes three more comments about the beginning of spring and two about the arrival of wintertime.<sup>54</sup> Such information is only a relative basis for reconstructing the overall chronology of the events of the war against the Pechenegs, since the period for which we have the least chronologically relevant data (1088–1090) covers a time span of an entire four years.

### 5.2.2 *Contested Dates*

Most scholars have traditionally dated the first Pecheneg attack, and thus the origins of the entire Byzantine–Pecheneg war, to 1086.<sup>55</sup> This year, the emperor sent *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos and his second-in-command Nikolaos Branas against the Paulikians, led by Traulos, who formed an alliance with the Pechenegs living in Paradounavon and were pillaging the Byzantine territory. The subsequent expedition eventually resulted in the fierce battle of Beliatoba and the defeat of the imperial forces.<sup>56</sup> From that point on, the way to Thrace was open to the Pechenegs, who raided and plundered its territory until their final defeat in April 1091. Moreover, this generally accepted timeframe for the war against the Pechenegs seems to fully agree with Anna Komnene’s information in the *Alexiad*. She notes that the early years of Alexios Komnenos’ reign were filled with war against the Normans. The Byzantine princess makes no particular mention of the attacks of other enemies, leading many historians to the conclusion that the Pechenegs lingered peacefully in Paradounavon between 1081 and 1086, leaving the Byzantine territory

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 249; Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 283; Dieter, “Glaubwürdigkeit,” 386; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133.

<sup>54</sup> For references to the coming of the springtime, see *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203), VIII.7.1. (p. 220), and VIII.3.4. (p. 242), and of the wintertime VIII.6.6. (p. 220) and VIII.11.6. (p. 235). Dieter notes that Anna Komnene mentions the arrival of winter three times (first *sub anno* 1086), but I managed to find only two mentions in the text of the *Alexiad*. See Dieter, “Glaubwürdigkeit,” 387, 390.

<sup>55</sup> Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 156; Dieter, “Glaubwürdigkeit,” 389; Chalandon, *Essai*, 108; Vasil N. Zlatarski, *История на Вългарската държава през сръдните ѝ вѣкове. Томъ II. Вългария подъ византийско владичество (1018–1187)* (Sofia, 1934), 185; Karagiannopoulos, *Ιστορία*, I, 47.

<sup>56</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 199–200).

alone.<sup>57</sup> The Pechenegs came to the fore only after the outbreak of the above-mentioned Traulos' rebellion and the conclusion of their mutual alliance.<sup>58</sup> The accounts penned by other Byzantine historians also seem to confirm this rather "idyllic" and peaceful image. For example, John Skylitzes mentions the conclusion of a peace treaty between the Pechenegs of Paristrion and Nikeforos III Botaneiates in October 1080.<sup>59</sup> However, the question is whether the Pechenegs respected this treaty or not. After all, the war with the Normans consumed all the military resources available to Alexios Komnenos. With this in mind, a question arises whether it is not more likely that the Pechenegs had already used this advantageous situation before 1086 to wage raids on the Byzantine territory.

Paradoxically, despite the aforementioned impression of the peaceful coexistence of the Pechenegs and Byzantium between 1080 and 1086 which is supported by the narrative of Anna Komnene, it is her text that contains clues to the contrary. The first one can be found in the section describing the war against the Normans, specifically in the defense speech of her father at the synod attended by church and secular dignitaries of the empire held at the imperial palace in Blachernae in December 1083 or January 1084.<sup>60</sup> As mentioned above, the emperor was trying to defend his double expropriation of church property, in particular liturgical vessels made of precious metals, in order to raise funds for the Byzantine army exhausted by the repeated defeats inflicted on them by the Normans. In his speech, he naturally referred to the current Norman threat, but also mentioned "*the Persian invasions and the raids of the Scyths*,"<sup>61</sup> which can mean nothing else but the fact that already during the war against the Normans the Seljuk Turks (*Persai*) and the Pechenegs (*Skythai*) were attacking the Byzantine territories in Asia Minor and in the Balkans respectively.

With regard to this reference, it is possible that Anna Komnene simply misplaced this information in her text. Although this happens quite often throughout the work (several such cases are mentioned above in the description of the war against the Normans), the excerpt quoted above certainly falls within the timeframe of 1083/1084. Fortunately, there is another written source, the *typikon* of the Bachkovo monastery (in today's

<sup>57</sup> See text and note 2 above.

<sup>58</sup> *Alexias*, VI.4.4. (p. 174), VI.14.2. (p. 200). See text below.

<sup>59</sup> See text and note 187 in Chap. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Alexias*, VI.3.2. (p. 172).

<sup>61</sup> *Alexias*, VI.3.3. (p. 172): "τὰς γὰρ τῶν Περσῶν ἐπελεύσεις καὶ τὰς τῶν Σκυθῶν ἐκδρομὰς"; Агаѳимова, "Взаимоотношения," 118.

Bulgaria), which is of use to us. Its text also contains information about the Pecheneg raids prior to 1086. The author of the text, *megas domestikos* and *sebastos* Gregorios Pakourianos, proudly claims that he has recently achieved a decisive victory over the Pechenegs.<sup>62</sup> Since the origin of the *typonikon* is without any doubt dated to December 1083<sup>63</sup> and since Pakourianos was still in command of the Byzantine units fighting the Normans in the autumn of 1082,<sup>64</sup> Frankopan logically concluded in his study that this victory over the Pechenegs must have happened between the end of 1082 and December 1083.<sup>65</sup> However, this dating is still quite vague, leaving us unable to determine more precisely the moment the Pecheneg attacks commenced. When reading the text of the *typonikon* closely, we learn that the Byzantine general achieved his miraculous victory thanks to the “powerful help and might of his [emperor’s] divine right.”<sup>66</sup> Use of the expression “powerful help” probably implies that *megas domestikos* received assistance in the form of soldiers or funds to get more recruits in case of a shortage of troops before the start of the campaign against the Pechenegs.<sup>67</sup> Financial help is much more likely, as all the units of the Byzantine army of the western half of the Empire were trying to stop the Norman onslaught across the Balkans at the time. However, where did the money come from? According to Anna Komnene, the state coffers were completely empty in the spring of 1082.<sup>68</sup> It seems likely that these finances originated from the aforementioned expropriation of church liturgical vessels. Alexios Komnenos resorted to this extreme measure twice at the beginning of his reign,<sup>69</sup> first, in the early spring of 1082 in order to finance a new upcoming expedition against the Normans,<sup>70</sup> and again probably a year later.

It is this second lesser-known and chronologically unspecified expropriation of church liturgical utensils and valuables that must be associated

<sup>62</sup> Gautier, Paul. “Le typonikon de Grégoire Pakourianos,” *REB* 42 (1984): 43. See also Arutjunova, “Взаимоотношения,” 116; Lemerle, “Typonikon,” 172; Peter Frankopan, “A Victory of Gregory Pakourianos against the Pechenegs,” *BSI* 57 (1996): 279; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101; Madgearu, *Organization*, 137.

<sup>63</sup> Lemerle, “Typonikon,” 173–174; Gautier, “Typonikon,” 19.

<sup>64</sup> See text above.

<sup>65</sup> Frankopan, “Victory,” 280.

<sup>66</sup> Gautier, “Typonikon,” 43: “διὰ τῆς μεγάλης βοηθείας καὶ δυνάμεως τῆς θείας αὐτοῦ δεξιᾶς.”

<sup>67</sup> Arutjunova, “Взаимоотношения,” 116.

<sup>68</sup> *Alexias*, V.1.4. (p. 142–143): “τὸ δὲ ἄτερ χρημάτων οὐκ ἐνήν.”

<sup>69</sup> Gautier, “Diatribes,” 8; Arutjunova, “Взаимоотношения,” 118.

<sup>70</sup> See text above.

with the Pecheneg invasion and, therefore, the very beginning of the war against these nomadic peoples. This interpretation can be supported by the fact that Anna Komnene herself explicitly notes that as soon as the emperor was informed of the new attack of the “*Scythians*,” he proceeded to the raising of funds “*for the same reasons*” (for covering the financial needs of the army) as before.<sup>71</sup> Based on this explicit statement about the connection between this second secularization of church vessels and the Pecheneg attack, researchers have tried to prove the misplacement of this excerpt in the *Alexiad*, arguing that it belongs to the context of events taking place in 1086 or later.<sup>72</sup> Their presumption can be regarded as flawed, since the passage concerned belongs precisely to the place in the text where it is included, that is, among the events associated with the war against the Normans,<sup>73</sup> and, coupled with the arguments above, it clearly confirms that the first Pecheneg attack took place before 1086.

Since the *terminus post quem* of the Pecheneg incursion is December 1083 (the date of the creation of the *typikon* of the Bachkovo monastery), it should now be easier to determine a more precise date for the start of the war against the Paradounavon Pechenegs. In 1083, Alexios Komnenos personally led a counterattack against the Normans commanded by Guiscard’s son Bohemund. This decisive military expedition brought the Byzantines their first success after a series of defeats in the form of a victory in the battle of Larissa in early April 1083.<sup>74</sup> But this operation was also marked by a very suspicious absence of *megas domestikos* Georgios Pakourianos. This could mean that sometime before the start of the campaign, in late February 1083, the emperor received reports of a new Pecheneg attack. This unwelcome and unexpected news must have thwarted the emperor’s plans, as he certainly intended to restore the fight against the Normans as soon as possible, urged by Leo Kefalas’ letters from besieged Larissa.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, Alexios Komnenos was obliged to change his plans. First, because he could not spare any of his units

<sup>71</sup> *Alexias*, V.2.5. (p. 145): “ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐθις ἄλλο νέφος ἐχθρῶν, τοὺς Σκύθας φημί, κατ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξορμῶν ἤδη μεμαθήκει καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡ συλλογὴ τῶν χρημάτων [...] ἐφ’ ὁμοίαις αἰτίαις ἐσπουδάζετο.”

<sup>72</sup> Gautier dates this passage to the second half of 1087; see Gautier, “Diatribes,” 8–9.

<sup>73</sup> Moreover, this information is organically included in the text. On the contrary, the passage that does not belong chronologically to this section is the description of the trial against John Italos. See note 453 in Chap. 4.

<sup>74</sup> See text above.

<sup>75</sup> See text above.

prepared to face the Normans in Thessaly for operations against the Pechenegs, he needed to raise extra funds either to hire mercenaries or conscript new recruits. But at this moment, the state treasury was empty. Under such circumstances, the only possible measure for the emperor was to ignore his own *chrysobull* of August 1082<sup>76</sup> and initiate a new wave of expropriation of church vessels. The funds raised in this manner were then sent by the emperor to Gregorios Pakourianos, whom he also entrusted with the mission to drive the Pechenegs out.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, this also seems to be the main reason why Pakourianos could not participate in the upcoming campaign against the Normans. On this basis, we can assume that the first attack by the Pechenegs of Paradounavon after 1080, and therefore the *de facto* beginning of the whole war, most likely occurred before the end of February 1083, still during the war against the Normans and not only after its end.

Another contested dating is the passage of the count of Flanders Robert the Frisian through the Byzantine territory on his pilgrimage. Although this event did not have a direct impact on the course of the war against the Pechenegs, it should be considered significant in terms of determining the otherwise very problematic chronology between 1088 and 1090. Scholars have traditionally dated his journey through the Byzantine territory to the autumn of 1087.<sup>78</sup> The reason for this extraordinary agreement in dating is that on the return trip home, Robert the Frisian, according to Anna Komnene, met her father in Beroe, where the emperor was taking several days of rest after the defeat of his army by the Paradounavon Pechenegs in the battle of Dristra.<sup>79</sup> The juxtaposition of the two events leads researchers to believe that the meeting must have occurred in 1087. However, this traditional dating cannot stand up when confronted with the preserved documentary material from the County of Flanders. Based on these sources, it has been proved that the count Robert the Frisian was absent from Flanders (i.e., on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land) between 6 July

<sup>76</sup> See text above.

<sup>77</sup> Gautier, “Diatribes,” 43.

<sup>78</sup> Heinrich Hagenmeyer, “Der Brief des Kaisers Alexios I Komnenos an der Grafen Robert I von Flandern,” *Byz. Zeitsch.* 6 (1897): 19, note 5 in Chap. 1; Chalandon, *Essai*, 117; Angold, *Empire*, 136. Yet, Vasil’evskij dates it to 1089; see Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 246, note 2; his view was also taken over by Zlatarski; see Zlatarski, *История*, 195.

<sup>79</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.1. (p. 218). See text below.

1087 and 27 April 1090.<sup>80</sup> This clearly suggests that the meeting between the count of Flanders and the Byzantine emperor could not have taken place in autumn 1087, but probably only two years later at the end of 1089 or beginning of 1090.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the two probably met in Constantinople, because at the end of 1089 the town of Beroe had already been deep in the territory controlled by the Pechenegs. Besides, Alexios Komnenos had been back in Constantinople since the beginning of September 1089.<sup>82</sup> Yet, regardless of the fact that this part of the narrative of the *Alexiad* is chronologically erroneous,<sup>83</sup> its plausibility cannot be questioned.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, we get to the part of the *Alexiad* describing the events that took place between 1088 and 1090,<sup>85</sup> which is, from a chronological point of view, so obscure<sup>86</sup> that several researchers who have tried to date individual events more accurately had to admit their helplessness.<sup>87</sup> My attempt to revisit this complicated issue is based on two basic and simple assumptions. First, Anna Komnene tried to narrate events in a strictly chronological sequence,<sup>88</sup> and second, the Byzantine princess did not skip a single year when describing the events in the period in question, yet sometimes

<sup>80</sup> See Charles Verlinden, *Robert I<sup>er</sup> le Frison, comte de Flandre* (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1932), 151; François L. Ganshof, “Robert le Frison et Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène,” *Byzantion* 31 (1961): 60–61, notes 3 and 4 in Chap. 1; *ibid.*, 61, note 1 in Chap. 1; Michel De Waha, “La lettre d’Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène à Robert I le Frison. Une revision,” *Byzantion* 47 (1977): 123–124.

<sup>81</sup> Ganshof, “Robert,” 61; De Waha, “Lettre,” 123–124; Shepard, “Attitudes,” 103; Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 73.

<sup>82</sup> In September 1089, Alexios Komnenos chaired the church synod held in Constantinople. See Walthar Holtzmann, “Die Unionsverhandlungen zwischen Kaiser Alexios I und Papst Urban II im Jahre 1089,” *Byz. Zeitsch.* 28 (1928): 40, 50.

<sup>83</sup> This has already been argued by Dieter. See Dieter, “Glaubwürdigkeit,” 389. However, it should be noted that this historian dated Alexios Komnenos’ meeting with the Flemish Count to 1085.

<sup>84</sup> Ganshof, “Robert,” 59.

<sup>85</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.1. to VII.7.4. (p. 218–222) and VII.9.1. to VII.10.6. (p. 227–236).

<sup>86</sup> In the *Alexiad*, there is another section that is chronologically confusing in a similar way. It is Book XI describing events in Palestine after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders until 1105, as well as the relations of Byzantium with the Seljuk Turks before 1113. See Howard-Johnston, “Alexiad,” 291, 294.

<sup>87</sup> Dieter, “Glaubwürdigkeit,” 390; Chalandon, *Essai*, 119; Paul Gautier, “Le discours de Théophylacte de Bulgarie à l’ autocrator Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène (6 janvier 1088),” *REB* 20 (1962): 96; Paul Gautier, “Défection et soumission de la Crète sous Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène,” *REB* 35 (1977): 217.

<sup>88</sup> Howard-Johnston, “Alexiad,” 294.

she described them in a sketchy and concise way, while at other times in great detail, depending on how many pieces of information she had at her disposal.<sup>89</sup> The examined passage begins with a description of the Pecheneg invasion south of the Haimos mountains and their encampment near the town of Markellai.<sup>90</sup> This is followed by the conclusion of the first peace treaty between the Byzantines and the Paradouvanon Pechenegs,<sup>91</sup> the arrival of the Kumans in the Balkans,<sup>92</sup> and their subsequent return to their settlements in the Pontic steppe.<sup>93</sup> The conclusion of the first peace treaty with the Pechenegs is an important moment for the dating of these events, because this act is also mentioned in another historical source, independent of the *Alexiad*—in the imperial speech of Theofylaktos of Ochrid addressed to the emperor Alexios Komnenos.<sup>94</sup> The speech is dated to 6 January 1088,<sup>95</sup> meaning that all the above-mentioned events had to take place before that moment, between the beginning of winter and the end of December 1087.<sup>96</sup>

Subsequent events described by Anna Komnene (from the period after the resumption of fighting between the Byzantines and the Pechenegs after the departure of the Kumans) need to be listed chronologically after 6 January 1088, since Theofylaktos does not mention any recent war events in his speech. Instead, he describes the idyllic peaceful life of Byzantine peasants once the treaty with the Pechenegs was concluded.<sup>97</sup> For the same reason, the conquest of Philippoupolis by the Pechenegs also needs to be dated to the spring of 1088.<sup>98</sup> In this part of the *Alexiad*, the

<sup>89</sup> A typical example is a description of events related to 1088.

<sup>90</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* This is the *de facto* second time that the Kumans are present in the Balkans, since they first arrived in early autumn 1087 as allies of the Paradounavon Pechenegs. *Alexias*, VII.5.1. (p. 216).

<sup>93</sup> *Alexias*, VII.5.3. (p. 218).

<sup>94</sup> For the identification of the peace treaty mentioned by Theofylaktos of Ochrid with the first of the two peace treaties concluded with the Pechenegs, see Gautier, “Théophylacte,” 98, 113. This hypothesis was criticized two years later by Ljubarskij in his brief annotation to the Gautier’s publication; see Jakov N. Ljubarskij, “Об источниках ‘Алексиады’ Анны Комниной,” *ВВ* 25 (1964): 269–271.

<sup>95</sup> This has been argued by Gautier, the main editor of the primary source; see Gautier, “Théophylacte,” 98–99, 104–105.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

description of events is rather poor and becomes almost as cursory as a telegram. We can only assume that the new (second) treaty with the Paradounavon Pechenegs was concluded in the autumn of 1088.<sup>99</sup> However, the nomads soon violated it,<sup>100</sup> and their penetration to the south was tentatively halted only by the arrival of cold weather at the turn of 1088/1089. The Pecheneg host wintered near the village (ridge) of Taurokomos, which Anna Komnene commented on by noting that it was the first time the nomads had not retreated beyond the Haimos mountains for the winter, but remained in the Byzantine territory.<sup>101</sup> We can thus infer that the mention of the renewal of combat operations around the Thracian towns of Charioupolis and Boulgarofygon, which, according to Anna Komnene, occurred with the arrival of springtime,<sup>102</sup> relates to the following spring of 1089. After brief description of hostilities, the princess mentions the creation of a new Byzantine army unit—a cavalry division known as the *archontopouloi* and its baptism of fire.<sup>103</sup> Description of its defeat fits seamlessly into the context of previously rendered armed encounters. Therefore, it can be concluded that these events also took place during 1089.

On the other hand, another piece of information, which seemingly relates to the above events, cannot be dated to 1089. It is the description of the arrival of 500 Flemish knights, their transfer to Asia Minor, where they were tasked by Alexios Komnenos with defense of the city of Nikomedia and its surroundings against the attacks of the Turkish emir Abu'l-Kasim (Abû'l-Qâsim, known to Anna Komnene as Apelchasem).<sup>104</sup> Considering this event to be the follow-up of the journey of the Flemish count Robert the Frisian, its traditional dating is untenable. As Alexios Komnenos' meeting with the count of Flanders is likely to have taken place at the end of 1089 or beginning of 1090, it is impossible to date the arrival of knights to the spring or summer of 1089 (before the actual meeting even occurred). Taking into account the shortest possible travel

<sup>99</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.5. (p. 219).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.6.6. (p. 220).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.7.1.-2. (p. 220–221).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.7.4. (p. 221–222). For Emir Abu'l-Kasim's life, see Claude Cahen, "La première pénétration turque en Asie-Mineure," *Byzantion* 18 (1946–1948): 45–51; Claude Cahen, *La Turquie pré-ottomane*, *Varia Turcica* 7 (Istanbul: Inst. Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes, 1988), 14–15; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 71.



time of knights from the county of Flanders to Byzantium,<sup>105</sup> they could not have arrived until a year later, that is, during the summer of 1090.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the dating of the arrival of the Flemish knights to the summer of 1090 and their deployment to defend Nikomedia coincides with the recovery of this important city from the hands of the Seljuk Turks, who seem to have controlled the city between 1087 and 1090.<sup>107</sup> The transfer of knights to Nikomedia (although they were certainly needed in the

<sup>105</sup>The Flemish knights probably traveled to Byzantium via Apulia, sailed across the Strait of Otranto to Dyrrachion, and from there went all the way to Constantinople along the Via *Egnatia*. The second alternative route through the Hungarian kingdom, and then via Belgrade, Nish, Sofia, and Adrianoupolis, was not open at the time because of the frequent Pecheneg incursions. A similar route was used five years later by some Crusaders of the First Crusade. See Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. I, *The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 142–144, 166–168; Jean Richard, *Histoire des croisades* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 55–56.

<sup>106</sup>See Ganshof, “Robert,” 61; De Waha, “Lettre,” 123–124, and most recently Belke, who believes that the Flemish knights came in the second half of 1090; see Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 74. See also Chalandon, *Essai*, 125; Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 251; Zlatarski, “Историја,” 199. Zlatarski advocates this dating for other reasons, specifically because it supports the thesis on dating the speech of Theofylaktos of Ochrid to January 1090. On the other hand, Verlinden argues that the Flemish knights arrived in Constantinople only between 10 February and 20 April 1091. This is based on his assumption that Alexios Komnenos’ letter to Robert of Flanders, written in early 1091, contains a request of the Byzantine emperor to the Flemish count to fulfill his commitment and send the promised military assistance. This means that, at the time of writing the letter, the Flemish knights had not yet been present in the territory of the Byzantine Empire and their arrival was induced only by the aforementioned letter. Verlinden, *Robert*, 163. However, this assumption does not correspond to the known facts in the *Alexiad* that, after arriving in Byzantium, the Flemish knights were sent by Alexios Komnenos to Nikomedia for some time, and did not engage in the fight against the Pechenegs. If they had come in the spring of 1091, there would have been no time left for their military activities in Asia Minor against the depredations of the Seljuk Turks.

<sup>107</sup>Clive Foss, “Nicomedia and Constantinople,” *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. by C. Mango and G. Dagron (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 188. Bondoux also claims that Nikomedia was conquered again in 1089/1090 (although he assumes that it fell into the hands of the Seljuk Turks as early as 1085). René Bondoux, “Les villes,” *La Bithynie au Moyen Âge*, ed. by B. Geyer and J. Lefort, *Réalités Byzantines* 9 (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 2003), 401. For the question of the conquest of Nikomedia by the Seljuk Turks, see also Cheynet, “Résistance,” 144–145 and Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 74 (Belke assumes that Nikomedia was conquered by the Seljuks in 1086).

military operations against the Pechenegs) suggests that the emperor urgently needed to secure the defense of the only recently regained vital territory in Asia Minor, which further supports the assumption that they indeed came to Byzantium in the summer of 1090. Furthermore, no researcher has questioned so far why Alexios Komnenos sent the precious and experienced mercenaries—the Flemish knights—to defend Nikomedia, instead of forming a city garrison from Byzantine soldiers. According to the testimonies of the First Crusade chroniclers, the walls of Nikomedia were in ruins when the crusaders passed through the territory of Asia Minor.<sup>108</sup> It is likely that they were in the same condition when the Byzantines reconquered it in 1090. To keep this important city, despite the absence of usable fortifications, was apparently beyond the capabilities of the freshly formed Byzantine units with very little combat experience. Thus, it seems logical that Alexios Komnenos decided to entrust its defense to the battle-hardened Flemish knights.

The subsequent detailed account of skirmishes at the Thracian towns of Rousion and Tzouroulon can be safely dated to 1090.<sup>109</sup> This dating is based on two indisputable facts. This part follows the description of struggles of the Byzantines against Tzachas (Çaka), the emir of Smyrna, that is, after the fall of Klazomenoi, Fokaia, Lesbos, and Chios,<sup>110</sup> dated between the end of 1089 and summer of 1090.<sup>111</sup> The text that begins after these events is already part of Book VIII, which, as noted above, deals with the events of the last and decisive year of the war. Most modern researchers accept dating of these events to 1090. However, they commit a certain inaccuracy by placing them in the spring/summer months, that is, the first half of that year.<sup>112</sup> However, after a careful reading of the text of the *Alexiad*, we can conclude that the Byzantine princess describes only part of the combat operations in Thrace, the total duration of which did not exceed two weeks. Moreover, as these hostilities took place immediately before the winter,<sup>113</sup> it is more logical to assume that Anna Komnene does

<sup>108</sup> Foss, “Nicomedia,” 188.

<sup>109</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.1. to VII.11.6. (p. 227–235).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.8.2. (p. 222–223).

<sup>111</sup> Gautier, “Diatribes,” 13; Gautier, “Défection,” 227.

<sup>112</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 127–128; Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 252–253; Zlatarski, “История,” 200–201.

<sup>113</sup> Alexios Komnenos leaves for the capital at the end of this chapter to spend the winter months there. *Alexias*, VII.11.6. (p. 235).

not offer their full-scale description throughout 1090, but only their last and decisive phase, which took place in the late autumn and early winter of 1090.

Finally, it is necessary to draw attention to the part of the *Alexiad* which describes the combat against the Paradounavon Pechenegs, yet which could also become a source of some contradictions in the dating of individual events. Although, as noted above, the dating of the events of the last year of the war is quite well known thanks to the detailed data provided by Anna Komnene, it is her following information that seems to be problematic. At the beginning of Book VIII, the Byzantine princess notes that her father was staying in Constantinople (after returning from previous fighting in Thrace) and that “*he had not had even a week’s relaxation in the palace*”<sup>114</sup> when news of the Pecheneg new advance forced him to set off with a unit gathered *ad hoc* on February 14 to protect the town of Choïrobakchoi.<sup>115</sup> In principle, there are two possible explanations for this interesting information. Either we accept Chalandon’s view that the events we had just dated to the end of autumn and the arrival of winter 1090 had to take place by the end of January 1091,<sup>116</sup> or that there is a gap in the text of the *Alexiad* and Anna Komnene simply omitted events that fell a week before February 14. The latter is more likely, since at the end of Book VII, there is a clear reference to how Alexios Komnenos, with the advent of winter (only winter at the turn of 1090/1091 comes into consideration), took care of the wintering of the army in Thrace before his return to Constantinople.<sup>117</sup>

### 5.3 COURSE OF THE WAR

The genesis of the war against the Pechenegs is a much more complex and less familiar chapter of Alexios Komnenos’ reign compared to the far more detailed account of events related to the war against the Normans. First, this is caused by the absence of direct period testimonies or important pieces of information in later written historical works. Our only main source, the *Alexiad*, openly fails to provide a broader historical introduction to the war against the Pechenegs that would better elucidate its

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., VIII.1.1. (p. 236).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 128.

<sup>117</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.6 (p. 235). See text below.

causes.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, this notable lack of information also stems from the political framework of the nomadic Pechenegs, which differed significantly from the political realities of the south Italian Normans (and the Byzantines as well) in many key aspects. For example, while the emergence of the Byzantine-Norman conflict can be clearly attributed to the personal ambitions and plans of the duke of Apulia and Calabria, Robert Guiscard, who, with an iron fist, first united the whole of Mezzogiorno and at the end of his career decided to bring under his heel the Balkan territories of the Byzantine Empire, in the case of the Paradounavon Pechenegs, there was no similar dominant leader with clear political and military objectives. Instead, Byzantine sources very often present the Pechenegs as an anonymous and often quite numerous mass of nomads led by various chieftains, with only some of them significant enough for Byzantine historians to refer to by their names in the descriptions of the ongoing events.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, the main features of the Pecheneg political organization are only very unclear and vague,<sup>120</sup> reflecting another aspect of the Pecheneg–Byzantine relations preserved in the period written sources—Byzantines seem to have mostly been quite inept when trying to understand the primitive structure of the nomad society and considered it barbaric and approached it with noticeable disdain.<sup>121</sup> Their negotiations with the Pecheneg chiefs were strenuous and lengthy in most cases and not all Pechenegs subsequently respected the peace treaties already concluded.

<sup>118</sup>The causes of this peculiar lacuna in an otherwise very significant historical work of Anna Komnene were analyzed by Howard-Johnston; see Howard-Johnston, “Alexiad,” 298–300.

<sup>119</sup>A classic example of this approach is Anna Komnene herself, who in one place in her work quite openly admits her reluctance to reproduce barbaric personal names and foreign ethnic groups, unless necessary. *Alexias*, XIII.6.3. (p. 401): “ὅπου γὰρ βαρβαρικῶν ὀνομάτων ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀπατεῖται χρῆσις.”

<sup>120</sup>The main reason for this condition is naturally the total absence of written sources of the Pecheneg origin. Alexander Paroń, *The Pechenegs. Nomads in the Political and Cultural Landscape of the Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill 2022), 3. A brief description of the Pecheneg political structure has already been discussed elsewhere; see Marek Meško, “Nomads and Byzantium: Problematic Aspects of Maintaining Diplomatic Relations with the Pechenegs,” *On Research Methodology in Ancient and Byzantine History*, ed. by J. Bednaříková and M. Meško (Brno: Masaryk University, 2015), 184–186. For more detailed analysis of Pecheneg political and social organization see Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 132–160.

<sup>121</sup>Hélène Ahrweiler, “Byzantine Concept of the Foreigner: The Case of the Nomads,” *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. by H. Ahrweiler and A. E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), 12.

For this reason the Pechenegs were frequently and repeatedly accused of wickedness and treachery.<sup>122</sup>

In order to understand the reasons ultimately leading to the emergence of the Byzantine-Pecheneg conflict, it will be necessary, at least briefly, to outline the roots of the Pecheneg presence in this part of the Balkans. This nomadic nation moved to the Byzantine territory as a result of large migratory movements in the Eurasian steppe, manifested by the increased pressure of the Oghuz Turks in the first third of the eleventh century,<sup>123</sup> which forced them to seek new refuges in eastern, central, and southeastern Europe.<sup>124</sup> A large part of the Pechenegs settled directly in the Byzantine territory as a result of the mass invasion at the turn of 1046/1047<sup>125</sup> and in consequence of the first Byzantine-Pecheneg war (1049–1053).<sup>126</sup> During this conflict, the Byzantines were unable to push the Pechenegs back north of the Danube, and thus a compact Pecheneg enclave was formed on the territory of the Byzantine province of Paradounavon with its center north and east of the city of Pliska, the former capital of the first

<sup>122</sup> Meško, “Nomads,” 183; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 218, 236ff.

<sup>123</sup> See Omeljan Pritsak, “Two Migratory Movements in Eurasian Steppe in the 9th–11th Centuries,” *Studies in Medieval Eurasian History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), 162–163. Recently, Paroń suggested a more precise time window for the clashes with the advancing Uzes, which he placed after careful analysis to the period between 1019 and 1027. Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 315.

<sup>124</sup> Peter B. Golden, “Nomads and Their Sedentary Neighbors,” *AEMAE* 7 (1987–1991): 56, 58; Victor Spinei, *The Great Migrations in the East and South East of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century* (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Cultural Institute, Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2003), 124–125, 130; Meško, *Obnova*, 50–51.

<sup>125</sup> The year 1048/1049 mentioned in earlier literature is no longer valid. For the correct dating of the Pecheneg invasion, see Jonathan Shephard, “John Mauropous, Leo Tornicius and an Alleged Russian Army: the Chronology of the Pecheneg Crisis of 1048–1049,” *JÖB* 24 (1975): 61–89 and Alexander P. Kazhdan, “Иоанн Мавропод, Печенеги и Русские в середине XIв,” *ZRVI* 8 (1963), 177–184; Alexander P. Kazhdan, “Once More about the ‘Alleged’ Russo-Byzantine Treaty (ca. 1047) and the Pecheneg Crossing of the Danube,” *JÖB* 26 (1977): 65–77, as well as Jacques Lefort, “Rhétorique et politique: Trois discours de Jean Mauropous en 1047,” *TM* 6 (1976): 265–303; Élisabeth Malamut, “L’image Byzantine des Petschénègues,” *Byz. Zeitsch.* 88 (1995): 118; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 325. For the course of the whole attack, see Attaleiates, 30; Skylitzes, 458; Zonaras, 642; Paul Stephenson, “The Byzantine Frontier at the Lower Danube in the Late Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700*, ed. by Daniel Power and Naomi Standen (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 92; Angold, *Empire*, 38; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 58; Spinei, *Migrations*, 133; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 326–327.

<sup>126</sup> For more detailed information on the course of the war, see Skylitzes, 465–473, 475–476; Attaleiates, 30–43; Zonaras, 644; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 73–76; Angold, *Empire*, 38–39; Fine, *Balkans*, 209–210; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 334–341.

Bulgarian state.<sup>127</sup> Under the peace treaty of 1053, the Paradounavon Pechenegs gained the status of allies (*symmachoi*) and their task was to help protect the Byzantine borders, for which they received financial rewards from the state (*flotimiai*).<sup>128</sup> They played their role well enough until the early 1070s, when a new generation of Pecheneg leaders took advantage of Byzantium's political crisis, accompanied by many foreign policy setbacks and territorial losses (e.g., in 1071, the aforementioned fall of Bari into Norman hands, the battle of Manzikert, or the Hungarian attack and the fall of Sirmion in the same year), and also increasingly started to manifest centrifugal tendencies.<sup>129</sup> These became fully discernible in 1072 after the outbreak of Nestor's uprising.<sup>130</sup> As a result of this rebellion, most of the province of Paradounavon effectively broke away from Byzantium<sup>131</sup> and the power over this territory was usurped by various local Pecheneg as well as non-Pecheneg dignitaries.<sup>132</sup> Given the relative weakness of the central imperial administration in Constantinople and

<sup>127</sup> Skylitzes, 465–467; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 68–69; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 93; Madgearu, *Organization*, 126.

<sup>128</sup> Attaleiates, 43; Angold, *Empire*, 39; Alexandru Madgearu, "The Pechenegs in the Byzantine Army," *The Steppe Lands and the World Beyond Them*, ed. by Florin Curta and Bogdan-Petru Maleon (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2013), 213; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 343. Since the Byzantines failed to achieve a decisive victory during the war against the Pechenegs, they attempted to bind the vested interests of the Paradounavon Pechenegs with those of the empire, that is, both Byzantium and the Pechenegs had a common interest in the security of the border on the lower Danube. See Paul Stephenson, "Byzantine Policy towards Paristrion in the Mid-Eleventh Century: Another Interpretation," *BMGS* 23 (1999): 56; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 93; Kyriazópoulos, *Θράκη*, 124.

<sup>129</sup> Marek Meško, "Pecheneg Groups in the Balkans (ca. 1053–1091) according to the Byzantine Sources," *The Steppe Lands and the World beyond them*, 189.

<sup>130</sup> Skylitzes, *Synecheia*, 166; Attaleiates, 204–205; Meško, "Groups," 188–189; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 98–100.

<sup>131</sup> According to Madgearu, the population of the western part of the province did not join the uprising, and the area of northern Dobrudja remained under Byzantine control, with the new administrative center in the ancient Noviodunum (now Isaccea, Romania; Byzantine name of this site is unknown) restored by the Byzantines by the end of the tenth century. The immediate surroundings of the former second Bulgarian capital Preslav and part of the Black Sea coast with a center in Mesembria (now Nesebăr, Bulgaria) also remained in Byzantine hands. Madgearu, *Organization*, 82–84.

<sup>132</sup> Stephenson, *Frontier*, 100. One of the most prominent figures was the Pecheneg chief (also having the Byzantine title of *exarchon*) Tatouch/Tatrys/Chales, who replaced the Byzantine provincial commander (*doux/katepano*) in Dristra. Attaleiates, 205; Alexandru Madgearu, "The periphery against the Centre: The Case of Paradounavon," *ZRVI* 40–41 (2003): 51; Vasile Marculeț, "Considérations concernant la fin du pouvoir des Petchénègues du Bas-Danube," *Annales de l'Université Valahia Târgoviște, Section d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* 14 (2012): 94, 98. See also Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 352–353.

the much more serious crisis affecting the Byzantine territories in Asia Minor at the time, which required the full attention of the state apparatus, the Byzantine elites were forced to quietly tolerate the current state of affairs. From this moment on, the relations with the emerging Pecheneg proto-state organization (perhaps “unofficially” called *Patzinakia* by the Byzantines)<sup>133</sup> were of alternately peaceful and warlike nature, as the Paradounavon Pechenegs often got involved in power struggles related to frequent changes on the imperial throne in the late 1070s.<sup>134</sup> Prior to Alexios Komnenos’ ascension to the throne in 1081, the last peace treaty was concluded by his direct predecessor Nikeforos III Botaneiates in October 1080, ensuring a cautious and relatively fragile peace in the northeastern Balkans.

### 5.3.1 *Pecheneg Inroads (1083–1086)*

At the beginning of 1082, the military situation of the Byzantine Empire was rather grave. Despite his extreme efforts, Alexios Komnenos not only failed to stop the Norman progress across Epirus, but, as described above, Byzantine troops under his command suffered significant losses in the battle of Dyrrachion on 18 October 1081. The Normans subsequently captured Dyrrachion itself. Having occupied this important port and foothold on the coast of Epirus, they began to prepare for the invasion into the Balkan hinterland along the Via *Egnatia*. Their intentions went unchanged despite Guiscard’s return to southern Italy in the spring of 1082. The Norman forces repeatedly crushed the weakened Byzantine army, and

<sup>133</sup> Meško, “Groups,” 190. See also Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 1, 141; Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 123, 125.

<sup>134</sup> For example, the Paradounavon Pechenegs alternately supported various claimants of the imperial throne. Vasil’evskij, “Печенери,” 147; Malamut, “Image,” 132–133. For instance, these nomads accounted for much of the insurgent forces of Nikeforos Bryennios and their early undisciplined withdrawal from the battle of Kalavrye in March 1078, coupled with the pillaging of Bryennios’ camp, significantly influenced the outcome of the battle. Attaleiates, 290; Haldon, *Wars*, 129–130; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 57–59; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 353. An uprising led by the Paulikian leader Lekas erupted in Philippoupolis in 1078 or 1079 with possible Pecheneg support. Attaleiates, 302; Skylitzes, *Synechia*, 184; Ioannis Anastasiou, *Oi Paulikianoi: H istoria kai h didaskalia ton apo tis emphaniseos mechri ton νεότερων χρόνων*, dissertation (Athens, 1959), 111; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 111; Malamut, “Image,” 134. Another insurgent general *prōtoproedros* and commander of Dyrrachion, Nikeforos Basilakios, also sought military support from the Paradounavon Pechenegs, sending them letters. Skylitzes, *Synechia*, 182–184; Attaleiates, 298–301; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101.

Guiscard's son Bohemund was resolved to seize the town of Larissa by winter. At the same time in Constantinople, Alexios Komnenos diligently sought alternative sources of funds and gathered troops for the next round of fighting that awaited him in the following year of 1083.<sup>135</sup> However, the war against the Normans was not the only source of concern for the Byzantine emperor. In the darkest hour, when Alexios Komnenos was preparing to save Larissa from the Norman iron clutch, new unexpected complications arose. As mentioned above, rumors of a new enemy incursion into the Byzantine Balkans reached Alexios Komnenos in January or February 1083 when he was still in the Byzantine capital. According to the aforementioned indications, these unexpected invaders were the Pechenegs, supported by the Kumans.<sup>136</sup> However, at that moment, most of the Byzantine troops were bound to fight the Normans in Thessaly. Therefore, it is very probable that the nomads crossed the Haimos passes without major complications and started to ravage the Byzantine territory. Without sufficient military reserves at his disposal, Alexios Komnenos was forced again to improvise. Given the seriousness of the situation, he was compelled to withdraw his most capable and trusted commander, *meġas domestikos* and *sebastos* Gregorios Pakourianos, from the struggle against the Normans and send him to fight the new invaders from the north instead.

Unfortunately, the only source describing these events, the aforementioned *typikon* written by Gregorios Pakourianos himself, contains no information on the size of the Pecheneg and Kuman forces or which territories in the Byzantine Balkans were affected by their invasion. Nevertheless, despite the terseness of the text and with regard to the course of previous nomad raids, it is possible to provide a hypothetical depiction of the course of this attack. Given the difficult economic situation of the Byzantine Empire and the aforementioned assumption of the engagement of most of the battle-worthy troops in the fight against the Normans,<sup>137</sup> the number of soldiers available to *meġas domestikos*

<sup>135</sup> See text above.

<sup>136</sup> In his *typikon*, Pakourianos mentions the Pechenegs and the Kumans as separate enemies. Gautier, "Typikon," 43. However, it is very likely that they attacked Byzantium together, as in 1078. Skylitzes, *Symechia*, 182–184; Attaleiates, 298–301.

<sup>137</sup> It is possible to assume that Alexios Komnenos left at least part of the men from the Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata* available to Pakourianos, that is, the troops he commanded in all battles since 1081 as *meġas domestikos*. Therefore, the participation of part of the *tagmata* from Makedonia and Thrace in repulsing the first Pecheneg raid cannot be ruled out, although there is no direct or indirect evidence for it.



Pakourianos at the beginning of 1083 could not have been large (probably ranging between 2000 and 4000).<sup>138</sup> Possibly, the number of attacking Pechenegs was not great either (otherwise Pakourianos would not have been able to crush them), although it is almost certain that they outnumbered the Byzantine forces.<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore, based on the information available, it is possible to hypothesize that it was the Paradounavon Pechenegs who started raiding the Byzantine territory in the first months of 1083, as was the case in 1080. The Kumans seem to have come into play only later when, at an unspecified moment, they decided to intervene in the favor of the Pechenegs. According to the *typikon*, the Kuman host managed to defeat the so far winning Byzantine units. Yet, we do not know any further circumstances of the battle or the time gap between the two encounters. This assumption is based on a single piece of information that after his victory over the Pechenegs, Pakourianos spent some time in Kuman captivity<sup>140</sup> and was later ransomed personally by the emperor.<sup>141</sup> Hypothetically, the Kuman troops most probably outnumbered not only the Byzantines, but also their nomadic allies, the Pechenegs. It can also be deduced that at first, there was no contact between the Pecheneg and Kuman hosts, as the Kumans initially did not

<sup>138</sup> Of course, the numerical strength cannot be determined with greater accuracy, as there is no mention of it in the sources. However, prior to Pakourianos, the position of *meγas domestikos* was held by Alexios Komnenos, who commanded a total of about 6500 men at the battle of Kalavrye in 1078. Haldon, *Wars*, 128. From a certain point of view, the situations of 1078 and 1083 can be regarded as analogous, since in neither case did *meγas domestikos* have access to the main battle units of the Byzantine army.

<sup>139</sup> In almost all cases, where there is a description of military encounters between the nomad and imperial forces in the Byzantine sources, Byzantine historians almost never fail to emphasize the numerical superiority of nomadic opponents. See more in Denis Sinor, "Introduction: the Concept of Inner Asia," *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. by Denis Sinor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10; Sinor, "Warriors," 134; Jonathan Shephard, "Information, Disinformation and Delay in Byzantine Diplomacy," *Byz. Forsch.* 10 (1985): 262; Svetlana A. Pletneva, "Печенегы, Торки и Половцы в южнорусских степях," *МЛA SSSR* 62 (1958): 196; Karasulas, *Archers*, 55.

<sup>140</sup> Gautier, "Typikon," 43: "ἀπὸ τῆς ἀλώσεως τῶν Κομάνων παραγεγονότι"; Lemerle, "Typikon," 172.

<sup>141</sup> The financial resources for ransoming Gregorios Pakourianos, as well as for the payment of the tribute to the Kumans, came from the imperial treasury, as mentioned in the text of two golden bulls of the emperor Alexios Komnenos quoted in the *typikon*. See Lemerle, "Typikon," 172–173; Gautier, "Typikon," 129. See also Dölger, *Regesten*, 31, no. 1098.

help the Pechenegs in their fight against the Byzantines.<sup>142</sup> The absence of the Kumans in the first encounter can still be explained by the fact that the Pechenegs may have asked the Kumans for assistance only after suffering a defeat at Byzantine hands.<sup>143</sup> The Kumans agreed to their request, invaded the Byzantine territory, and defeated the Byzantines, completely taken by surprise (with Pakourianos apparently falling into their captivity at this moment). After dividing the spoils with the Pechenegs, the Kumans collected the ransom and the tribute payments from the Byzantines<sup>144</sup> and returned their captives. After that, they retreated to their settlements located along the lower Don (or the Siverskyi Donets) and the Dnieper.<sup>145</sup>

As regards the area affected by the Pecheneg and Kuman attacks and the exact location of the armed encounters, due to the almost complete silence of the sources, we are once again forced to rely solely on hypothetical arguments and estimates. Another brief reference in the *typikon* could be of crucial importance, according to which the Bachkovo monastery, located south of Philippoupolis, was built in an area inhabited by the “*unsettled nation*” (*anidyryton ethnos*). Could this predisposition of the local population be caused, for example, by enemy raids, in our case by the incursions of the Pechenegs and the Kumans?<sup>146</sup> Finally, the last and most

<sup>142</sup>The lack of coordination of the attacks can be explained by the fact that while the Paradounavon Pechenegs could invade the Byzantine territory at virtually any time, the Kumans did not have such an opportunity because of the long distance of the area of fighting from their settlements. Therefore, both nomadic allies engaged the Byzantines separately (the Kumans probably later than the Pechenegs).

<sup>143</sup>In 1087, the Pecheneg chief Tatouch resorted to a similar solution and decided to negotiate military assistance of the Kumans under the threat of the Byzantine attack. *Alexias*, VII.3.3. (p. 209); see also the text below.

<sup>144</sup>See note 141 above.

<sup>145</sup>Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 165. See also notes 295 and 528 below.

<sup>146</sup>Gautier, “Typikon,” 33. The interpretation of this passage clearly depends on the translation of the adjective *ἀνίδρυτον*. Gautier, the editor of *typikon*, used the French equivalent *turbulent*, meaning “turbulent, tumultuous, wild.” Gautier, “Typikon,” 32. In her recent article, Laiou argues that this expression refers to the Bulgarians; see Angeliki Laiou, “L’Étranger de passage et l’Étranger privilégié à Byzance,” *Byzantium and Other: Relations and Exchanges*, ed. by Cécile Morrisson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 77. Other researchers believe that it means the Paulikans (of Armenian ethnic background). See, for instance, Rach Bartikian, “Об «ἀνίδρυτον ἔθνος»-е («неустойчивом народе»), упомянутом в «типике» Григория Пакуриана,” *Herald of the Social Sciences* 7 (1980): 78–79 (Russian resume of the article written in Georgian language). However, this adjective also means “taking a hostile attitude toward someone.” According to my assumption, the inhabitants of the Philippoupolis area may have been hostile toward the local Byzantine administration on the grounds that it failed to effectively defend them against the incursion(s) of the Paradounavon Pechenegs in 1083.

important question logically arises: Does the decision of the emperor Alexios Komnenos to appoint Pakourianos (despite the obvious fact that he urgently needed him to fight the Normans) have any additional connection to the direction of the Pecheneg attack? It is known that this Byzantine general of Georgian descent owned extensive estates in the area south of Philippoupolis.<sup>147</sup> Thus, in 1083, Pakourianos was probably well versed in the geography of this part of the Byzantine Balkans, and, therefore, would be the best person to ensure its defense. On the basis of these considerations, it can be assumed that the area where the hostilities between the Byzantines on one side and the Pechenegs and the Kumans on the other took place was located on the upper Maritsa river, or in the wider surroundings of Philippoupolis.<sup>148</sup> However, based on the current state of research, it is not possible to answer these questions unambiguously.

Although very few direct references have been preserved of the first Byzantine victory over the Pechenegs, the further development of events clearly suggests that its logical consequence was the sharp decline in Pecheneg inroads into Byzantine territory for the next two years. During this period, the Pecheneg leaders apparently did not wish to risk new conflicts with Byzantium. A new opportunity for raiding and plundering areas south of the Haimos mountains arose only after the outbreak of Traulos' uprising in 1084. Traulos was originally a Paulikian from Philippoupolis, but later, during the reign of Nikeforos Botaneiates, rejected his affiliation to this Christian heresy and converted to the Orthodox version of Christianity. At the same time, he became a personal servant of the then *mezas domestikos* and *sebastos* Alexios Komnenos, whom he served faithfully even after his rise to the Byzantine imperial throne.<sup>149</sup> However, Traulos' relation to his master changed suddenly when he learned that the property of his four sisters was confiscated as part of Alexios Komnenos' punishment of the rebellious *tagma* of the Paulikians in November

<sup>147</sup> Pakourianos then founded the Bachkovo monastery on the aforementioned estates. Their inventory can be found in the text of the *typikon*. Gautier, "Typikon," 35 ff.

<sup>148</sup> This important Thracian city and its surroundings were the subject of interest of the Pecheneg raiders also later in 1086 and 1088, when the Paradounavon Pechenegs apparently controlled this city for a short time. See text below.

<sup>149</sup> *Alexias*, VI.4.2. (p. 174); Anastasiou, *Παυλικιανοί*, 115; Zlatarski, *История*, 180; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 288–289. Traulos apparently entered Alexios Komnenos' services in 1078 in Philippoupolis, when Alexios commanded the Byzantine troops heading to fend off the Pecheneg raids in the area between Nish and Sardike. Bryennios, 298.

1083.<sup>150</sup> Enraged, he secretly fled from the Byzantine capital along with a large number of his friends and relatives. The Paulikian fugitives then found refuge in an abandoned fortress north of the town of Beliatoba.<sup>151</sup> According to current research, this fortress lay somewhere on the southern slopes of the Sredna Gora mountains.<sup>152</sup> From there, driven by a strong desire for revenge, Traulos began organizing raids and incursions into the surrounding area, some of which reached in the spring of 1084 as far south as Philippoupolis.<sup>153</sup>

Byzantium's slow and indecisive response to these depredations can be explained by the new and decisive round of fighting against the Normans that was taking place at the same time. Guiscard had just launched his final offensive from the coast of Epirus in September and October 1084 to neutralize the Byzantine gains of the previous year.<sup>154</sup> Another reason could be a likely outbreak of new clashes with the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, Alexios Komnenos was forced initially to resort to purely diplomatic means—he tried to pacify Traulos with friendly letters urging him to stop the attacks. Finally, when these repeated calls proved ineffective, at the end of 1084(?), the emperor issued a golden bull (*chryso-boullas logos*), in which Traulos with his companions, and followers were promised full amnesty if they laid down their weapons and stopped their depredations.<sup>156</sup> However, the rebels rejected all of the emperor's proposals for reconciliation. Traulos not only continued in raids between 1084

<sup>150</sup> See note 631 in Chap. 4.

<sup>151</sup> *Alexias*, VI.4.2. (p. 174); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 155; Chalandon, *Essai*, 107; Zlatarski, *История*, 181; Anastasiou, *Παυλικιανοί*, 115; Ραροί, *Pechenegs*, 359.

<sup>152</sup> See Zlatarski, *История*, 181, no. 1; Chalandon, *Essai*, 107; Malamut, "Image," 134. The ruins near the site of Rozovec on the southwestern slopes of the Särmena Sredna Gora mountains, about 45 kilometers northeast of Plovdiv, are considered to be the remains of Traulos' fortress. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 197.

<sup>153</sup> *Alexias*, VI.4.3. (p. 174); Chalandon, *Essai*, 107; Anastasiou, *Παυλικιανοί*, 115. It is unclear when Traulos began with his attacks against Byzantine subjects. In my opinion, it was already in the spring of 1084; Chalandon dates his raids to 1085. See Chalandon, *Essai*, 105.

<sup>154</sup> See text above.

<sup>155</sup> In 1084, the Turkish emir Abu'l-Kasim attacked Byzantine Bithynia and penetrated all the way to the coast of Propontis. See *Alexias*, VI.9.1 (p. 186); Chalandon, *Essai*, 108; Vryonis, *Παρακμή*, 133. Gautier and Belke date this attack to 1086. See Gautier, "Théophylacte," 103; Belke, "Bemerkungen," 72–73, 78.

<sup>156</sup> *Alexias*, VI.4.4. (p. 174); Dölger, *Regesten*, 33, no. 1120; Anastasiou, *Παυλικιανοί*, 115; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101.

and 1085, but even began seeking alliance with the Pecheneg chiefs in Paradounavon, who, according to Anna Komnene, were residing in the towns of Glabinitza<sup>157</sup> and Dristra on the lower Danube.<sup>158</sup> Traulos' attempt to join his insufficient forces with the mighty military potential of the Paradounavon Pechenegs was no surprise because, as mentioned above, similar proposals had been sent to the Pechenegs by almost all rebels against central imperial power in the course of the second half of the 1070s.<sup>159</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Pecheneg leaders warmly accepted Traulos' proposals and an alliance treaty between the two parties was confirmed by Traulos' marriage to a Pecheneg noblewoman—daughter of one of the Pecheneg chiefs.<sup>160</sup> In the spring of 1086,<sup>161</sup> after a break of almost three years, the Pechenegs, this time as allies of the Paulikianians from Beliatoba, crossed the Haimos mountains and headed south to Byzantine Thrace.<sup>162</sup>

In response to the reports of the new incursion, Alexios Komnenos sent troops against the Pechenegs under the command of *sebastos* and *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos. His second in command (*hypostratēgos*), general Nikolaos Branias, who held this position since 1081, also

<sup>157</sup>The location of Glabinitza remains unknown (not to be confused with Glabinitza in Epirus mentioned in connection with the war against the Normans; see text and note 213 in Chap. 4), but most researchers agree that it was located on the lower Danube near Dristra. Zlatarski, *История*, 181; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 116.

<sup>158</sup>*Alexias*, VI.4.4. (p. 174); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 155; Chalandon, *Essai*, 107; Anastasiou, *Παυλικιανοί*, 115; Malamut, “Image,” 135. Although Anna Komnene does not give any names of the Pecheneg chieftains, one of the recipients of Traulos' alliance proposals had to be the aforementioned Pecheneg *exarchōn* based in Dristra—Tatous. In this context, the above-mentioned find of the bronze seal of a certain Constantine who held the court title *bestarchēs* and was the commander of the Byzantine fleet (*droungarios ton ploimon*) is interesting. This seal was found directly in Dristra and, due to its characteristics as well as the command rank, can be dated prior to 1085. Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 379–380. Of course, it is not possible to determine what this Constantine discussed with the Pechenegs in Dristra around 1085, but it can be imagined that his letter contained peace proposals of the Byzantine emperor, who in this way may have tried to discourage the Pechenegs from their planned alliance with Traulos.

<sup>159</sup>See note 134 above.

<sup>160</sup>*Alexias*, VI.4.4. (p. 174); Chalandon, *Essai*, 107; Zlatarski, *История*, 182; Malamut, “Image,” 135; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101.

<sup>161</sup>Chalandon, *Essai*, 108.

<sup>162</sup>The Pechenegs probably crossed the Haimos mountains via the Shipka pass (Shipchenski prohod, 1190 meters above sea level), located approximately 36 km northeast of the hypothetical location of Traulos' fortress near Beliatoba.

participated in the campaign.<sup>163</sup> Since in the spring of 1086 the war against Guiscard was already a matter of the past, *meġas domestikos* Pakourianos probably had a much larger army at his disposal than in the course of the year 1083 when the fighting against the Normans was at its height. There is no indication of composition or numerical strength of Byzantine units earmarked for this campaign in the *Alexiad*.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, the bulk of the forces under Pakourianos' command very likely consisted of cavalrymen from Makedonia and Thrace, as well as of an unknown number of Thracian infantry formations stationed around Adrianoupolis. The Byzantine battle order was possibly strengthened by one or several mercenary *tagmata* of unknown composition.<sup>165</sup> According to various estimates, the entire army could have had up to 10,000 men.<sup>166</sup> The participation of Byzantine troops from other parts of the empire is very unlikely, as hostilities with the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor continued throughout 1086.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 200); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 155; Chalandon, *Essai*, 109; Zlatarski, *История*, 185. For Nikolaos Branas' career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 252–253. In 1081, Branas was appointed the second in command (*hypostatēgos*) by *meġas domestikos* himself and his task was to remain in Adrianoupolis during Pakourianos' long absence caused by his involvement in the fight against the Normans. *Alexias*, VI.4.1. (p. 123).

<sup>164</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 200).

<sup>165</sup> However, there exists one chrysobull of Alexios Komnenos issued for the monastery of Megisti Lavra on Mount Athos in May of 1086 that contains a list of mercenary units and their ethnic origin in Byzantine service around this time. In this we find the Rus', Varangians, Koulpings, English (Anglo-Saxons), Franks (Normans), Germans, Bulgarians, and Saracens (possibly Seljuk Turks). Some of them could be transferred under Pakourianos' command. See *Actes de Lavra*, p. 258: „Ῥῶς, Βαράγγων, Κουλίγγων, Ἰγγλίνων, Φράγγων, Νεμίτζων, Βουλγάρων, Σαρακηνῶν.”

<sup>166</sup> This figure is based on Cheynet's assumption that both *tagmata* had a total of up to 10,000 men during the battle of Kalavrye in March 1078. However, it should be noted that the overall estimate also includes units of Thracian infantry. See Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 67, 353, note 29. During the battle of Dyrrachion in 1081, their numerical strength is estimated at about half the previously estimated number (5000 men). Haldon, *Wars*, 134. However, this estimate is not contrary to the above figure, as the battle of Dyrrachion may not have involved all the *tagmata* in full force, but only their subdivisions. It should also be taken into account that these troops suffered casualties during the war against the Normans in the battles of Dyrrachion (1081), Joannina (1082), and Larissa (1083), but, due to the lack of information in the written sources, it is impossible to quantify these losses more precisely.

<sup>167</sup> The hostilities between Byzantine forces under the command of *meġas primikerios* Tatikios and the Seljuks of Abu'l-Kasim took place in Bithynia. *Alexias*, VI.9.1. to VI.13.4. (p. 186–199); Chalandon, *Essai*, 101–101; Gautier, "Théophylacte," 101; Belke, "Bemerkungen," 72–73, 78.

When the Byzantine army finally reached the hilly terrain around Beliatoba, both Byzantine commanders discovered that the Pechenegs had already passed through the mountain defile and encamped not far from the aforementioned stronghold of Traulos' insurgents. In line with her own tradition, Anna Komnene does not indicate the numerical strength of attackers and only laconically notes that the Pecheneg host was "*in such vast numbers*" so that, in direct contrast to her earlier statement, "*the Romans were vastly outnumbered.*"<sup>168</sup> Although not detailed, this information rings true, because for this reason Pakourianos first decided to postpone the fight with the Pechenegs and lie in wait for a more suitable opportunity to attack.<sup>169</sup> However, less cautious and more impulsive Branas eventually persuaded his superior to change his mind when he openly accused him of cowardice. Pakourianos yielded, and as a result, soldiers were ordered to prepare for battle. Subsequently, a fierce engagement broke out, the exact course of which is unfortunately unknown, as Anna Komnene's description is very succinct. The Byzantines seem to have tried by repeated cavalry attacks to pin down the Pechenegs in a close combat in which they could take advantage of their heavier protective armor. Nevertheless, the elusive nomads successfully avoided hand-to-hand combat, showering the attackers with many arrows, and as a result the Byzantines began to suffer first casualties.<sup>170</sup> Misfortunate Branas was slain during one of such vain cavalry charges; a short while later, a similar fate befell Pakourianos himself.<sup>171</sup> The death of both Byzantine commanders practically ended the battle, as the demoralized Byzantines were routed and started to flee in panic, trying to save themselves. The initial success allowed the Pechenegs to start systematically pillaging the territory north and east of Philippoupolis.<sup>172</sup>

In addition to the sudden increase in the direct Pecheneg threat to Philippoupolis, the failure in the form of the defeat of the Byzantine forces and the death of *meegas domestikos* Pakourianos at Beliatoba literally opened

<sup>168</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 200).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, Gregorios Pakourianos' attitude perfectly corresponded to the measures recommended for similar situations by the Byzantine general Kekaumenos in his *Strategikon*. See Kekaumenos, 89, 91.

<sup>170</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 200). Attacks of heavy cavalry formations represented the basis of the Byzantine army's combat tactics in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Kühn, *Armee*, 128.

<sup>171</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 200); Chalandon, *Essai*, 109; Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 156; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101; Madgearu, *Organization*, 137; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 360.

<sup>172</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.3. (p. 200); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 156; Zlatarski, *История*, 185.

the way to Adrianoupolis, the main Byzantine bastion and the most important city in Thrace, to various large groups of nomads.<sup>173</sup> Alexios Komnenos' reaction clearly indicates that he started to consider the new situation critical. Immediately after learning of the defeat,<sup>174</sup> the emperor had his proven and loyal supporter and capable general, *megas primikerios* Tatikios, transferred from Asia Minor to Adrianoupolis.<sup>175</sup> At the same time, Tatikios received enough funds to assemble a new battle-ready army with the aim to engage the Pechenegs as soon as possible.<sup>176</sup> The emperor also realized that as a result of the defeat and severe casualties among the troops from Makedonia and Thrace, Tatikios might be short of experienced cavalymen in the upcoming fight against the Pechenegs.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, a little later, he ordered Constantine Houmbertopoulos<sup>178</sup> to move his cavalry *tagma* composed of Norman knights<sup>179</sup> from the town of Kyzikos in Asia Minor and cross the Bosphorus to Thrace in order to strengthen the Byzantine units under Tatikios' command.<sup>180</sup> As for the size of the hastily assembled army,<sup>181</sup> it is again very difficult to arrive at a

<sup>173</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 109.

<sup>174</sup> This apparently happened at the end of spring of 1086. Gautier, "Théophylacte," 103.

<sup>175</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.4. (p. 200). The criticality of the situation is evidenced by the fact that Alexios Komnenos withdrew Tatikios from Asia Minor where he was engaged in a struggle against the Seljuks, and even some military units were redeployed with him to reinforce weakened troops in Thrace at the expense of the defense of Bithynia. Belke, "Bemerkungen," 72–73. For Tatikios' earlier career, see note 276 in Chap. 4.

<sup>176</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.4. (p. 200–201); Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101.

<sup>177</sup> Anna Komnene notes the visible relief shown by Tatikios when his predominantly infantry units were joined by experienced Norman cavalymen. *Alexias*, VI.14.4. (p. 201).

<sup>178</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.4. (p. 201). *Nōbelissimos* (this supreme court title was used ca. since 1085; see Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 312–314; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 491) and *doux* Constantine Houmbertopoulos was an experienced commander, who had already demonstrated his qualities during the war against the Normans (he fought in the battle of Dyrrachion). See also note 272 in Chap. 4.

<sup>179</sup> Due to the fact that only in July 1085 did the war against the Normans end and a number of Guiscard's men did not return to southern Italy after the duke's death, but joined the ranks of the Byzantine army (especially after the conquest of Kastoria in November 1083 and then in July 1085; see text above and note 740 in Chap. 4), it is almost certain that the name *φράγγοι/κέλτοι*, used in this part of the *Alexiad*, refers to these men.

<sup>180</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.4. (p. 201); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 156; Belke, "Bemerkungen," 72–73; Madgearu, *Organization*, 137.

<sup>181</sup> The information on the size of the gathered army is in Anna Komnene's work contradictory at best. On the one hand, the Byzantine princess notes that Tatikios' army was strong enough ("*ίκανόν ... στρατεύμα*"), and, on the other hand, she claims that Tatikios did not consider his force adequate to successfully face the more numerous Pechenegs in a direct pitched battle. *Alexias*, VI.14.4. (p. 201) and VI.14.7. (p. 202).



more accurate numerical estimate. However, it is reasonable to assume that the total number of forces designated to stop the Pechenegs almost certainly fell short of forces under Pakourianos' command. In particular, because of the losses suffered at Beliatoba by the cavalry *tagmata* from Makedonia and Thrace, there were almost no cavalry units—except for the one composed of Norman mercenaries under Houmbertopoulos' leadership, which was certainly less numerous (400 to 500 men) than a typical Byzantine cavalry unit composed only of indigenous soldiers (up to 5000 men).<sup>182</sup> Yet, it balanced its reduced numerical strength with better and heavier offensive and defensive equipment and superior combat experience.<sup>183</sup> However, the infantry formations were more numerous than the cavalry units and it is realistic to assume that they could have been at least 3000-men strong.<sup>184</sup>

In the early autumn of 1086,<sup>185</sup> the Byzantine units with Tatikios in command set out from Adrianoupolis and marched toward Philippoupolis along the *Via Militaris*, which followed the northern bank of the Maritsa river.<sup>186</sup> Approximately halfway through the 165-kilometer-long journey,

<sup>182</sup>The size of 400 to 500 men was a common average in the newly formed units of the Norman and other Latin (i.e., Latin West) mercenaries during the second half of the eleventh century. See Haldon, *Warfare*, 104, as well as Cheynet, “Rôle,” 117 and Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 323–324, and also related literature found therein. In my personal consultations with Haldon and Cheynet, both scholars repeatedly confirmed this estimate.

<sup>183</sup>Various Norman units serving in Byzantium during the eleventh century were highly praised by their employers, and thanks to their heavy cavalry equipment became the spearhead of all the Byzantine armies in the West and in the East since the 1040s. It is only natural that in the critical situation after the defeat at Beliatoba, Norman cavalry *tagma* was sent by the emperor to stem the Pecheneg tide. For the eminent role of the Normans in Byzantine army, see Jonathan Shepard, “The Uses of the Franks in Eleventh-Century Byzantium,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993): 276; Georgios Theotokis, “Rus, Varangian and Frankish Mercenaries in the Service of the Byzantine Emperors (9th–11th c.): Numbers, Organisation and Battle Tactics in the Operational Theatres of Asia Minor and the Balkans,” *Vyzantina symmeikta* 22 (2012): 143ff; Christos Markrypoulis, “‘Our Engines are Better than Yours’: Perception and Reality of Late Byzantine Military Technology,” *Byzantium and the West: Perception and Reality (11th – 15th c.)*, ed. by Nikolaos G. Christis, Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, and Angeliki Papageorgiou (London: Routledge, 2019), 307.

<sup>184</sup>In the text describing Tatikios' encounter with the Pechenegs, which will be analyzed below, Anna Komnene suggests the division of the Byzantine combat formation into three sections (the right and left wings and the center). *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202). According to Byzantine military customs, each section ideally consisted of at least one *taxiarchia* of infantrymen, that is, a section of 1000 men (see note 55 in Chap. 2).

<sup>185</sup>Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 157.

<sup>186</sup>Chalandon, *Essai*, 109.

the Byzantines started to discern first visible signs of Pecheneg raiding. When they started building a marching camp<sup>187</sup> on the bank of an unnamed right tributary of the Maritsa near Blisnos (also known as Salinos),<sup>188</sup> the Byzantine spies returned to the main bulk of the army and informed Tatikios<sup>189</sup> of the presence of a group of nomads nearby. Unaware Pechenegs were slowly traveling westward along the Maritsa, laden with spoils of war and leading many captives.<sup>190</sup> Upon hearing the news, Tatikios did not hesitate (despite the fatigue of the Byzantine soldiers after a day-long march) and promptly ordered a part of the army to go ahead and attack the nomads, while the rest of the troops were tasked with finishing the building of the camp.<sup>191</sup> Once finished, Tatikios and the latter were to follow in the footsteps of the first unit and possibly reinforce its onslaught. Meanwhile, the Pechenegs stopped on the riverbank and waited for other fellow warriors who had dispersed in the surrounding area in search of more plunder.<sup>192</sup> After discovering this new fact, Tatikios divided his forces into two parts and ordered them to engage the nomads. Despite being taken by surprise, the nomads began to defend themselves fiercely, and although some of them were killed during the ensuing clash, most were able to mount their horses and save their lives, leaving their spoils behind.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>187</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.5. (p. 201).

<sup>188</sup> The river on the bank of which the Byzantines built the camp is probably the Sazlijka river. Blisnos was within three days march west of Adrianoupolis, with its exact location uncertain. Researchers locate it somewhere between today's Bulgarian towns of Galäbovo and Simeonograd. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 210; Zlatarski, *История*, 185.

<sup>189</sup> Anna Komnene states that Tatikios himself spotted the Pechenegs. This assertion does not seem to be true, otherwise the Pechenegs and the Byzantines would have seen each other already when marching, and the subsequent skirmish would have taken place quite differently. Rather, Anna Komnene offers a simplified description of events with noticeable short-cuts. The spies and scouts were a permanent and indispensable component of the Byzantine army while on a campaign; besides monitoring the opponent's movements, they were to look for the best places for camping. See Haldon, *Warfare*, 150, 152.

<sup>190</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.5. (p. 201); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 156.

<sup>191</sup> This is a typical example of surviving Roman military traditions. Another is, the building of a marching camp, as well as the above-mentioned division of the army into the part that builds the camp and the part that guards the baggage train and the builders. A detailed description of the procedure for building a camp can also be found, for example, in the Byzantine military manual *Anonymou biblion taktikon*, which is, considering the time of its creation (around 1020), one of the manuals closest to the events described and analyzed here. See Dennis, *Treatises*, 243, 247 ff.

<sup>192</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.5. (p. 201).

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, Zlatarski, *История*, 186.

Anna Komnene's description gives a strong impression that the Pecheneg forces were not as numerous as expected and that it was just a small group of nomads, which, like many others at the time, was roaming the Thracian countryside, looking for opportunities to plunder.<sup>194</sup>

Tatikios' rather bold decision to attack the Pechenegs *de facto* without any possibility to rest was amplified by the fact that initially only about half of his troops was in position to engage the nomads. If the number of the Pechenegs was bigger, this uncoordinated attack by divided military forces would surely have resulted in the Byzantine debacle.<sup>195</sup> The fact that this did not happen, as well as the fact that the Byzantines prevailed in the fight, suggests that the nomads did not have their usual typical advantage of numerical superiority. In my opinion, the description of this skirmish also clearly confirms the aforementioned lack of cavalry on the Byzantine side, because although they were able to surprise the Pechenegs, the ambushed nomads managed to escape easily, relying on the speed of their horses. Since the Byzantine cavalry was so scanty and the Norman cavalry too sluggish for light-footed nomad horses, they had to settle for the spoils left behind by the nomads.<sup>196</sup> Thus, the first Byzantine "victory" ultimately had no real impact on the overall situation. Its only positive effect was a short-term boost of morale among the Byzantine rank-and-file soldiers.<sup>197</sup>

Immediately after reaching the outskirts of Philippoupolis, Tatikios started organizing the defense of the whole area. First, he deployed spies

<sup>194</sup>The dispersal of warriors into small mobile units when moving through the enemy territory was a typical feature of the steppe warfare. It was advantageous in several ways, since, on the one hand, it allowed even a large number of nomads to be able to live off the local resources and plunder larger territory, thus increasing the quantity of spoils obtained, and, on the other hand, it confused enemy forces in terms of main direction and target of the nomadic attack, while allowing for a highly effective monitoring of the enemy movements. If the nomads came across a larger enemy host, their scattered groups could join and attack shortly. This tactic was perfected by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. See Karasulas, *Archers*, 53; George T. Dennis and Ernst Gamillscheg, *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* in *Mauricii Strategicon*, intro., ed. and index by George T. Dennis, CFHB, vol. XVII (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 362.

<sup>195</sup>There was a similar situation during the battle between the Byzantines and the Pechenegs at Diakene in 1049. The then Byzantine commander attacked the nomads without allowing his exhausted soldiers to rest, which resulted in a disastrous defeat of the Byzantine army. See Skylitzes, 468–469, 475–476, and, in particular, Kekaumenos, 93, 95.

<sup>196</sup>*Alexias*, VI.14.5. (p. 201).

<sup>197</sup>For a contrasting assessment of this skirmish, see Stephenson, *Frontier*, 101.

and scouts to all access roads to the town to monitor the movements of the main bulk of the Pecheneg host camping nearby, north of the town of Beliatoba.<sup>198</sup> The enemy host outnumbered the Byzantine forces by a large margin and Tatikios considered very carefully whether it was worth risking an engagement with the nomads in an open field battle.<sup>199</sup> It was only the news of the approaching Pechenegs that finally forced him to act.<sup>200</sup> The next morning, the Byzantine army set off from Philippoupolis and, after crossing the Maritsa, set up a camp on its north bank.<sup>201</sup> In anticipation of an imminent attack by the nomads, Tatikios ordered his troops to arrange in the battle formation.<sup>202</sup> Unfortunately, Anna Komnene provides here a minimum of information on the composition and arrangement of the Byzantine army. According to her brief description, Tatikios divided his forces into three parts (left wing, center, and right wing), personally taking command of the center of the Byzantine combat line-up.<sup>203</sup> As for the orientation of the entire formation, the soldiers in the front rank seem to have been facing north, whereas the rear was protected by the north bank of the Maritsa. Tatikios certainly had to take into account the numerical advantage and superior mobility of the Pechenegs, thus trying to prevent the nomads from outflanking and encircling his units (there were significantly more infantry than cavalymen at Tatikios' disposal). In fact, the Byzantine predominantly defensive position with a well-covered rear allowed the nomads only one line of approach—frontal attack.<sup>204</sup>

When the Pechenegs arrived within a short distance of the Byzantine camp, they started to prepare for the battle and assumed the combat formation “*in their Scythian fashion*.”<sup>205</sup> Thanks to centuries-long conflicts

<sup>198</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.6. (p. 201); Zlatarski, *История*, 186; Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 156. Tatikios' measure fully agrees with the advice given for a similar situation by Kekaumenos. Kekaumenos, 53, 55.

<sup>199</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.6. (p. 201); Malamut, “Image,” 136.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> The claim about pitching the camp immediately after crossing the river is based on Anna Komnene's information that after the whole day of waiting, the army returned to the (already built) encampment. See *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202).

<sup>202</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 201–202); Zlatarski, *История*, 186; Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 156.

<sup>203</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202).

<sup>204</sup> Exactly the same arrangement is recommended to military commanders in the anonymous military manual known as the *Strategikon of Maurice*, written at the beginning of the seventh century (probably between 592 and 602) when facing the “*Scyths*” (the nomadic peoples of the steppe). See Dennis and Gamillscheg, *Strategikon*, 366.

<sup>205</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202).

with various nomadic peoples of the steppe, the Byzantines were familiar with this arrangement. The Pechenegs divided into two big hordes (flanks), which were further subdivided into a large number of smaller groups of warriors, each consisting of about fifty cavalrymen. According to the situation, the nomads either formed a compact battle line-up or at various times detached from the main bulk of the host and then returned, or, if necessary, operated completely independently. The purpose of this arrangement was to carry out consecutive attacks on the front ranks of the enemy formation, while other groups tried to outflank it and shower it with volleys of arrows from behind.<sup>206</sup> However, the overall arrangement of the Byzantine army and its strong defensive position on the bank of the Maritsa made similar tactics ineffective. This was certainly realized by the Pecheneg commanders, and therefore, despite their clear numerical superiority, they suddenly became very hesitant to mount a frontal attack against heavily armored Byzantine soldiers. The “wait and see” game was also played by Tatikios, both because of the Pecheneg numerical superiority and because he had no intention of abandoning his strong defensive position. Only Norman mercenaries were more than eager to engage in combat, and Tatikios had to remind them of the strict orders to hold the line.<sup>207</sup>

Therefore, neither side was in a hurry to attack and remained motionless all day. At sunset, both the Byzantines and the Pechenegs returned to their encampments, convinced that the decisive battle would take place on the following day.<sup>208</sup> However, with the new day, no one was willing to take the initiative, so another night and day passed, during which both the Byzantines and the Pechenegs held their lines, facing each other. Finally, at the dawn of the third day, the Pecheneg chiefs, seeing the strong determination of the Byzantines, decided it was time to go back to their

<sup>206</sup> “Scythian” formation is referred to in the *Strategikon of Maurice*. See Dennis and Gamillscheg, *Strategikon*, 218 (reference to the use of this type of combat formation in the Byzantine army), 362 (description of its characteristic features). The division of the nomadic (Pecheneg, or Kuman) forces into smaller groups of warriors is also mentioned in the late eleventh-century written accounts from Kievan Rus’, which state that each such group carried its own combat standard or sign. Pletneva, “Печенеги,” 197–198. For information on Arabic sources describing the Pecheneg combat tactics, see also András Pálóczi Horváth, *Petschenegen, Kumanen, Jassen: Steppenvölker im mittelalterlichen Ungarn* (Budapest: Corvina, 1989), 17–18.

<sup>207</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202); Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 156–157; Zlatarski, *История*, 186.

<sup>208</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202).

settlements in Paradounavon.<sup>209</sup> Their return journey probably led along the southern slopes of the Sărna Gora mountains and north of the towns of Beroe, Diampolis, and Goloe, because, according to Anna Komnene's narrative, the Pechenegs used the Sidera pass (Rishki prohod) to cross the Haimos mountains.<sup>210</sup> Tatikios did not want to stay completely idle after the Pecheneg withdrawal, so he started to pursue them, although to no effect due to the acute lack of cavalry.<sup>211</sup> In the end, Tatikios decided to return with all forces under his command back to Adrianoupolis, where he dissolved most of the units and soldiers were allowed to return home for winter. The remaining part of the army, along with the *tagma* of Norman mercenaries, was placed under the command of Constantine Houmbertopoulos and was tasked with guarding Adrianoupolis and its surroundings in case the Pechenegs returned. Subsequently, Tatikios took the road to the Byzantine capital with only a small armed escort, where he probably reported to Alexios Komnenos in person the course and the outcome of the just-finished military campaign.<sup>212</sup>

These events may have forced Alexios Komnenos to adopt another, often overlooked measure, aimed at strengthening the seaside defensive "wing" of the Byzantine Thrace south of the Haimos mountains. The emperor seems to have administratively separated the territory of the entire Black Sea coastline, with important ports of Anchialos (today's Pomorie),<sup>213</sup> Mesembria (today's Nesebăr),<sup>214</sup> Sozopolis (today's Sozopol),<sup>215</sup> and Develtos (today's Debelt)<sup>216</sup> located there, from the

<sup>209</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 157; Zlatarski, *История*, 187.

<sup>210</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202); Zlatarski, *История*, 187; Пароћ, *Pechenegs*, 360. There are several reasons to assume that the Pecheneg troops were following exactly this route. First, it was the shortest way from the surroundings of Philippoupolis to the Sidera pass and it led through flat terrain, which would certainly facilitate the Pechenegs to transport large volumes of spoils and captives. Second, the Pecheneg commanders probably wanted their troops to live off the resources from the Byzantine territory for as long as possible on the way back to their settlements in Paradounavon.

<sup>211</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 157; Chalandon, *Essai*, 109–110; Zlatarski, *История*, 187.

<sup>212</sup> *Alexias*, VI.14.7. (p. 202); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 157; Chalandon, *Essai*, 110; Zlatarski, *История*, 187.

<sup>213</sup> Anchialos, lying on the spur protruding into the waters of the Gulf of Burgas, represented a significant hub of overland and maritime communications during the Byzantine period and was therefore of great military as well as economic importance. Soustal, *Thracien*, 175–177. See also text below.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 355–359.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 454–456.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 234–235.

province of Makedonia and Thrace. In its stead a new province (*thema*) of Anchialos was established by the end of 1086 (or the turn of 1086/1087).<sup>217</sup> The primary task of this new administrative unit was most probably to improve the level of defense of mountain passes in the eastern half of the Haimos mountains. Furthermore, its crucial role was to provide bases to the Byzantine fleet, which was being reconstructed at the time, in case single military vessels or large naval squadrons from Constantinople needed to be dispatched to the area of the lower Danube to intervene either against the Paradounavon Pechenegs or against any other threat descending in this strategically important area from the north.<sup>218</sup> However, it is ultimately very difficult to estimate to what extent and how soon after its creation this new administrative and military unit could contribute to the active defense of the Byzantine territories south of the Haimos. Moreover, it is not clear whether its military commander (*doux*) had at least some military troops at his disposal since the establishment of this province.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>217</sup> *Alexias*, VI.9.6. (p. 188); Kühn, *Armee*, 168; Kyriazópoulos, *Θράκη*, 242; Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 67. This idea was further developed by Madgearu, who assumes that a new administrative-military unit was created in early 1087 in connection with the fending off of the great Pecheneg incursion (see text below). Madgearu, *Organization*, 85. My assumption of its establishment in 1086 is based on the fact that it was a purely defensive measure and, therefore, logically occurred after the repulsion of the first serious Pecheneg attacks taking place in the second half of 1086. If the *thema* of Anchialos had been created in early summer 1087, its establishment would have had to be rather offensive in nature (supporting the major Byzantine attack against the Paradounavon Pechenegs; see also text below) on an *ad hoc* basis, since the great Pecheneg invasion in the spring of 1087 was, in my opinion, unpredictable (see text below). At the same time, the establishment of a new *thema* would have taken place only shortly before (or at the same time as) the campaign itself, which is not very logical if it were to effectively support the Byzantine war effort north of the Haimos mountains. Anchialos later proved its worth and exceptional strategical significance during the Kuman invasion in 1095 (see text below).

<sup>218</sup> Madgearu, *Organization*, 85.

<sup>219</sup> The first commander of the newly formed province (*thema*) of Anchialos was a Turk named by Anna Komnene as Siaous (Çavuş), who, as an envoy (*çavuş*) of the Seljuk ruler of Damascus, Tutuş (1078–1092), respectively his older brother Sultan Malikshah (1072–1092), defected to the Byzantines and received baptism, and eventually enabled Alexios Komnenos to regain control of the north coast of Asia Minor with the important port of Sinope. *Alexias*, VI.9.6. (p. 188) and VI.12.1. (p. 194); Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 274; Kyriazópoulos, *Θράκη*, 242; Soustal, *Thrakien*, 176; Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 67; Brand, “Element,” 4–5; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 281.

### 5.3.2 *Pecheneg Invasion (1087)*

Although the Byzantine generals Tatikios and Constantine Houmbertopoulos eventually managed to drive the Pechenegs off, this success led neither to the end of hostilities nor to the conclusion of a new truce with the Paradounavon nomads (as was the case, e.g., in 1080). In fact, a new and unpredictable event changed the course of the ongoing conflict—a massive Pecheneg invasion in the spring of 1087.<sup>220</sup> This attack represents a significant turning point in the *de facto* limited and local nature of the Byzantine-Pecheneg war.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, according to Anna Komnene, it was again the Pechenegs who attacked. Yet, this time, they did not come from Paradounavon, but from the territories north of the Danube,<sup>222</sup> having virtually nothing in common with the ongoing conflict up to this point. The invaders were led by the Pecheneg chief Tzelgou (Çelgü),<sup>223</sup> who appears in the description of the war events for the first time. Moreover, the motives of the attacking Pechenegs seem to have been different from the usual plundering and raiding, or military support of various rebels against the central rule in Constantinople, which had been characteristic of all the nomad inroads up to this point. This assumption is based on the fact that alongside Çelgü and his Pechenegs, one of the attackers was also the deposed Hungarian king Solomon (1063–1074).<sup>224</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not have any other detailed information about the events prior to the invasion and its initial phase. Anna Komnene, as

<sup>220</sup>There is no doubt about the dating of this invasion to spring 1087, as it precedes the aforementioned and firmly dated solar eclipse that took place on 1 August 1087. See text and note 44 above.

<sup>221</sup>The hostilities were limited only to the area north of Philippoupolis and its surroundings, and the numbers of defenders and attackers were not too high either. The same applies to the scale of military operations carried out. Further evidence of the relatively restricted nature of the conflict is the fact that even though Alexios Komnenos considered the situation critical after the defeat at Beliatoba, he did not assume command of the units fighting off the Pechenegs, as was the case during the key campaigns of the war against the Normans.

<sup>222</sup>*Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203). These nomads were distant relatives of the Pechenegs south of the Danube who, after the great Pecheneg invasion of 1046/1047, decided to remain in the territory north of the Danube. For more detailed information on this Pecheneg group in the late eleventh century, see Meško, “Groups,” 194–196.

<sup>223</sup>*Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203). See also Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 311; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 361.

<sup>224</sup>For possible reasons for Solomon’s participation in this expedition and his fate between 1074 and 1087 elsewhere, see Marek Meško, “Pečenežsko-byzantské dobrodružstvo uhorského kráľa Šalamúna (1083–1087),” *Konštantínove listy* 4 (2011): 77–94.



already stated, presents the great Pecheneg attack from the north in spring 1087 as a surprising and sudden act without any apparent reason.<sup>225</sup> It is easy to get a false impression from her description that thanks to the element of surprise the fast-moving nomads were able to advance deep into the territory of Byzantine Thrace (as far south as the city of Charioupolis),<sup>226</sup> and only then did the Byzantines adopt the first defensive counter-measures.<sup>227</sup> However, on the basis of a thorough analysis of the text of the Byzantine princess, it has been concluded that this impression was wrong, as an extensive description of the initial phase of the fighting is clearly left out in the *Alexiad*.<sup>228</sup> Only in this way can we explain Anna's other mysterious note that the emperor Alexios Komnenos bought out one of his commanders, *patrikiōs anthypatos* and *katepanō* Gregorios Maurokatakalon, from Pecheneg captivity.<sup>229</sup> This rather inconspicuous piece of information is clearly at odds with the rest of the text, as the commander in question appears in Anna Komnene's narrative for the first time, and, moreover, the Byzantine princess does not provide any detail about when and how Maurokatakalon was captured by the nomads.<sup>230</sup>

Based on these indications, it can be assumed that in the late winter and early spring of 1087, an unknown number of unspecified Byzantine troops with the participation (or under the command?) of Gregorios

<sup>225</sup> See also text and note 118 above.

<sup>226</sup> Today's Turkish town of Hayrabolu. Asdracha, "Thrace," 250; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 308–310.

<sup>227</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203). See Chalandon, *Essai*, 112; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 36.

<sup>228</sup> This was first argued by Dieter, "Glaubwürdigkeit," 387, and later by Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 430.

<sup>229</sup> Apart from a few mentions in the *Alexiad*, Gregorios Maurokatakalon is a less-known military commander. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 111–112. Besides, the sigillographic material associated with his person published so far is not very rich and does not cover his entire *cursus honorum*. According to the latest findings, he seems to have been the *strategos* of the northern part of Paradounavon (i.e., those territories that were still under Byzantine control after 1072). Several lead seals from the lower Danube region with the titles of *patrikiōs*, *anthypatos*, and *katepanō* seem to confirm this assumption, although there is no name of the province inscribed on them. See Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 83, as well as Costel Chiriac, "Un nouveau sceau de Grégoire Mavrokatakalon découvert à Oltina (départ. de Constanta)," *Études byzantines et post-byzantines* 4 (2001): 113–121. However, it has been wrongly believed until recently that these seals should be dated back to the earlier period (the 1050s or 1060s). For this, see Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 280–281.

<sup>230</sup> See *Alexias*, VII.2.3. (p. 205); Dieter, "Glaubwürdigkeit," 387.

Maurokatakalon was facing Pecheneg advance somewhere on the territory of the Byzantine Balkans. Furthermore, the Byzantines apparently suffered defeat in these initial clashes, as their commander(?) Maurokatakalon (like Gregorios Pakourianos in 1083) fell into Pecheneg captivity.<sup>231</sup> It is also impossible to further define the area where the Byzantines tried to stop the nomad advance or where the Pechenegs actually crossed the Danube.<sup>232</sup> As mentioned above, despite Nestor's rebellion in Paradounavon in 1072, the Byzantines managed to retain control of some parts of this province. Therefore, it can be assumed that the area where it came to blows should be the northern part of Dobrudja with its administrative center in Issacea (ancient Noviodunum). And Gregorios Maurokatakalon seems to have been the commander (*katepanō*) of these remaining Byzantine enclaves north of the Haimos.<sup>233</sup> Logically, then, it is a possible location of the first defensive battles of the Byzantines.<sup>234</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that other Maurokatakalon's seals were found at the sites of Melnitsa and Klokotnitsa south of the Haimos,<sup>235</sup> which, if indeed related to the Pecheneg invasion in the spring of 1087, might indicate that the Byzantine defense, besides defending the remaining territories in northern Dobrudja, also focused on stopping the invaders advancing

<sup>231</sup> Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 430.

<sup>232</sup> The only Byzantine fortress on the lower Danube, the destruction of which is probably linked to the turbulent events of the 1080s, is Garvān (ancient Dinogetia; its Byzantine name is unknown), lying on the bend of the Danube, where its watercourse turns from the north and runs eastward to the Black Sea. Perhaps it was due to the proximity of the Pechenegs in the spring of 1087 that the buildings outside the perimeter of the walls of this fortress were abandoned. Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 106, 132. Therefore, it is possible to imagine the situation that in the spring of 1087 the Pecheneg host crossed the Danube somewhere nearby and continued further south, attacking the existing Byzantine enclaves around Issacea and Nufărul (east of Garvān), where the center of the Byzantine administration was located (see text above), or in the southwest direction toward today's Oltina, where the seal of Gregorios Maurokatakalon was uncovered (probably attached to a letter in which its inhabitants and garrison troops were warned of the approaching Pechenegs). See note 229 above.

<sup>233</sup> This hypothesis was formulated by Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 430. See notes 131 and 229 above.

<sup>234</sup> Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 430, note 35 in Chap. 2; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 282–283; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 3, 647.

<sup>235</sup> Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 430.

via mountain passes south to Thrace.<sup>236</sup> At the same time, the attacking Pechenegs probably progressed south in at least two separated columns—the western one apparently traversed the Haimos through the Shipka pass north of Philippoupolis (Klokotnitsa lies on the road between Philippoupolis and Adrianoupolis), whereas the eastern one apparently traveled via the Sidera pass (Melnitsa is located in the Tundzha river valley, north of Adrianoupolis). Both lines of advance then seem to have met somewhere in the vicinity of Adrianoupolis.<sup>237</sup>

After overcoming the assumed initial resistance of the Byzantines, the Pechenegs under Çelgü's leadership headed south. The nomad host bypassed Adrianoupolis, the main base of the Makedonian and Thracian *tagmata*<sup>238</sup> and the seat of its military commander (*doux*),<sup>239</sup> as they did not intend to besiege or conquer it, and instead marched to Charioupolis, where they plundered the fertile valley of the Ergene river. Later, the Pechenegs moved their camp to Skoteinon,<sup>240</sup> where they began to

<sup>236</sup> This hypothesis is based on the fact that the seals were part of the letters, or orders, that Maurokatakalon sent from his command post in Isacceia. Their purpose may have been to warn of an impending Pecheneg invasion, or to give instructions to the Byzantine garrisons stationed at the sites where the seals were uncovered. Alexios Komnenos used a similar strategy only a few years later, in 1095, during the Kuman raid. See text below. In connection with these findings, the discovery of the seal of *meġas domestikos* Adrianos Komnenos in Isacceia should also be mentioned. Although the seal is dated to the period between 1087 and 1105, Barnea does not rule out that the find may be related precisely to the Pecheneg invasion of 1087, or the Kuman invasion of 1095. See Ion Barnea, "Sceaux byzantins du Nord de la Dobroudja," *RESEE* 23, no.1 (1985): 31–32. Since Adrianos Komnenos apparently fell into disgrace with his brother Alexios Komnenos (see text below) after the failed 1094 conspiracy of Nikeforos Diogenes, it can be assumed that the seal is related to the invasion of the Pechenegs in 1087, thus representing further probable evidence of communication (originally containing orders, dispatches, or warnings) between the supreme commander of all the Byzantine units in the Balkans and his subordinate (*doux/katepanō*) in the remaining Byzantine outpost in Paradounavon.

<sup>237</sup> If this assumption is correct, the nomads led by Çelgü effectively sought to bypass the territory of the supposedly newly formed province of Anchialos. See text above.

<sup>238</sup> For a basic overview of this province, which was created by merging the separate provinces of Makedonia and Thrace in the first half of the eleventh century, see Kyriazópoulos, *θράκη*, 195–199.

<sup>239</sup> See Kühn, *Armee*, 206–207. For an overview of the city's rich history during the eleventh century, see Soustal, *Thrakien*, 163, and also text and note 164 in Chap. 6. Unfortunately, the list of military commanders of the province during this period is still far from complete.

<sup>240</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203). The location of this site is unknown; see Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 654. However, it is very likely that Skoteinon was located to the west of the nearby town of Charioupolis, that is, on the road between this town and the town of Pamfylos.

concentrate all spoils acquired nearby.<sup>241</sup> The Byzantine units soon appeared in the same area, most probably from Adrianoupolis,<sup>242</sup> led by experienced generals Nikolaos Maurokatakalon<sup>243</sup> and Bempetziotes.<sup>244</sup> The Byzantines halted their march near the town of Pamfylos.<sup>245</sup> The Byzantine commanders soon learned about the exact location of the Pecheneg camp from numerous refugees (mostly local peasants from the surrounding area who sought refuge in the fortified Thracian towns and strongholds) and, in consequence, advanced with the whole army to the fort (*polichnion*) of Koule, where the decisive encounter was to take place.<sup>246</sup> In the following text of the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene describes

<sup>241</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 158.

<sup>242</sup> Byzantine troops were unlikely to move to the area of fighting from the Byzantine capital, as the city of Adrianoupolis (the main base of the *tagma* of Thrace and Makedonia) was closer. Moreover, if the Byzantine army were to arrive from Constantinople, it would approach the Pechenegs from a different direction, from the northeast or east, not from the northwest.

<sup>243</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203). Nikolaos Maurokatakalon was probably one of the commanders of the Byzantine troops stationed in Thrace (theoretically, he may have been the *doux* of the entire province, but this is not evidenced in the period sources, nor can this presumption be confirmed by the existing sigillographic material uncovered so far). A little later (based on Anna Komnene), he may have held a post under *meegas domestikos* Adrianos Komnenos similar to that of Nikolaos Branas before him under Gregorios Pakourianos, that is, he was his aide, deputy, and second-in-command. See text below and also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 256–257. Several lead seals of this Byzantine general dating back to the last quarter of the eleventh century have also been preserved, but none, as already stated, confirms the above assumptions (these seals are from his later life, when Maurokatalon no longer held a military position). See Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 283. It is also likely that he was somehow related to the general Gregorios Maurokatakalon (based on the same last name), but there is no definite proof of this.

<sup>244</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203). We have very little data about this Byzantine commander, not knowing even his first name. His last name is usually derived from the location of *Mempetz* or *Bempetz* (ancient town of Hierapolis) in the Euphrates basin (today's Manbij, Syria). This is also the only mention of him in the entire historical work of Anna Komnene. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 46. Based on the lead seal finds, a link can be established between this Byzantine commander and a certain Theodoros Bempetziotes, whose seal, without specifying a rank, dating back to the late eleventh century or the first quarter of the twelfth century, is displayed in the Numismatic Museum of Athens. See Christos Stavrakos, "Korrekturen zu Lesung einiger Siegel des Numismatischen Museums Athens," *SBS* 2 (1990): 39–47.

<sup>245</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 158; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 117; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 36. The town of Pamfylos is believed to have been located near today's town of Uzunköprü near the Ergene river. Asdracha, "Thrace," 253; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 560–562.

<sup>246</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 158; Zlatarski, *История*, 189.

the maneuvering of both opposing hosts before the battle. Her narrative is rather confusing here, which is enhanced by the fact that scholars have not been able to pinpoint the location of Skoteinon and Koule so far.<sup>247</sup> Some older historians came to a faulty conclusion that the fort of Koule was located south of Pamfylos, that is, on the road leading from Adrianoupolis along the Maritsa to the port of Ainos near its estuary to the Aegean Sea, and thus wrongly assumed that the Byzantine troops actually retreated.<sup>248</sup> Indeed, the reason for such a misleading impression could have been provided by Anna Komnene's statement, according to which "*Skyths (...) closely followed their tracks.*"<sup>249</sup> However, according to another piece of information from the *Alexiad*, which I strongly believe is of more crucial importance, the sites of Skoteinon and Koule were located in close proximity to each other.<sup>250</sup> Assuming that Skoteinon was lying on a direct line running between the towns of Charioupolis and Pamfylos, the information provided by Anna Komnene then implies that the Koule fort should also be located somewhere on the same road connecting the two towns. Thus, if the Byzantine army retreated from Pamfylos southward, it would move away not only from Skoteinon, where the Pechenegs were initially encamped, but also from the fort of Koule, where the Byzantine troops pitched their camp later. This small detail is the final proof that this line of reasoning is wrong, because it clearly does not match the further development of the situation.

These considerations indicate a much bolder course of action—after leaving Pamfylos, the Byzantine army was actually advancing toward the Pecheneg camp.<sup>251</sup> This offensive move of Nikolaos Maurokatakalon can

<sup>247</sup> The actual site of the fort of Koule is unknown, but historians believe that it corresponds to today's location of Chelebiiköy, located about 22 km southeast of the port of Enez (in Byzantine, Ainos). However, Soustal rightly observes that this belief is in principle unfounded and the identification of the Koule castle with Chelebiiköy is practically an expression of willfulness, rather than an assumption based on an analysis of historical data. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 328.

<sup>248</sup> See Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 158; Chalandon, *Essai*, 113. The hypothesis of these two historians was also adopted by Diaconu. See Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 117.

<sup>249</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203).

<sup>250</sup> The distance between the two locations could not have been great (up to 10 km), as Anna Komnene notes that a small stream was running between them. *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204).

<sup>251</sup> Nikolaos Maurokatakalon, an experienced commander, must have known that he was most likely observed from the heights by the Pecheneg scouts. For this, see *Alexias*, VII.1.1.

be explained in two ways. The Byzantine commander either did not want to allow the Pechenegs to leave the Ergene river valley too soon and engage in plundering areas elsewhere such as the fertile valley of the Maritsa river and thus intended to block them from further advance, or was trying to start a battle with the Pechenegs in the rather cramped surroundings of Charioupolis, where numerous hills and heights would be more advantageous for the Byzantines, because this would, to some extent, hamper the freedom of maneuvers of the Pechenegs. It is also possible that Nikolaos Maurokatakalon pursued both of these objectives simultaneously. Relying on the numerical superiority of his host, the Pecheneg chief Çelgü confidently accepted the challenge, and after the Byzantines gathered in Koule the next morning, the Pecheneg host was ready to fight.<sup>252</sup> However, at that moment, Nikolaos Maurokatakalon seems to have faltered—having seen the countless hordes of Pecheneg warriors from a hillside dominating the area, he probably had to acknowledge the evident numerical superiority of the enemy.<sup>253</sup> He convened a meeting of his commanders to decide again whether to attack the Pechenegs now or whether to postpone the battle to a more favorable moment.<sup>254</sup> In the end, his subordinates encouraged him to engage the enemy—the strongest supporter of this idea was Basileios Kourtikios (nicknamed Joannakes).<sup>255</sup> After short preparations, the Byzantine army arranged in the battle formation, divided typically into the center and two wings. Then, Nikolaos Maurokatakalon ordered to sound the signal to attack.<sup>256</sup>

Yet again, it is very difficult to arrive at precise figures relating to the size of both armies. Anna Komnene claims that Çelgü's host was 80,000 men strong,<sup>257</sup> which is certainly exaggerated. I believe that there could not have been more than 40,000 Pecheneg warriors, or that their number

(p. 203).

<sup>252</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204).

<sup>253</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204).

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 203–204. Perhaps Maurokatakalon had the recent fateful deaths of Gregorios Pakourianos and Branas in his mind, and did not want to commit the same errors.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 204. This experienced commander had previously fought in a series of armed encounters against Bohemund's Normans at Larissa in 1083; see text and note 520 in Chap. 4. Kourtikios may have found himself in the ranks of the troops facing the Pechenegs as a military counsellor sent by Alexios Komnenos from Constantinople, in the company of his younger brother Adrianos Komnenos. See note 265 below.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

fluctuated between thirty and 40,000.<sup>258</sup> Despite further information by the Byzantine princess, the number of warriors accompanying the former Hungarian king Solomon could not be significantly high,<sup>259</sup> taking into account the fact that he was in exile for several years without financial resources of any significance. The Hungarian host may have consisted of a maximum of several hundred men and, therefore, is of little relevance to our estimates of the enemy force.<sup>260</sup> In her description of Çelgü's heterogeneous host, Anna Komnene also notes other nomads, namely the Uzes (*Sauromatai*).<sup>261</sup> As regards their number, the written sources leave us clueless, and their size cannot be determined on the basis of the existing information. Thus, we can conclude that the entire Çelgü host was approximately 40,000 men strong (no more than half the number reported by Anna Komnene). When estimating the size of the Byzantine army, we can assume that there were the same units which had faced the Pecheneg

<sup>258</sup> This assumption is based on the theory of the existence of three Pecheneg groups in the Balkans at the end of the eleventh century (two north of the Danube and one in the province of Paradounavon), which I have discussed elsewhere. See Meško, *Obnova*, 144–149; Meško, “Groups,” 188–197. According to this theory, Çelgü directly controlled only about half of all the Pechenegs living north of the Danube, while the second chief Kutesk, who for some time provided refuge to the deposed Hungarian king Solomon and, therefore, is referred to in the *Chronicon Pictum*, controlled the rest of the territory. However, Kutesk's Pechenegs did not take part in this expedition. At the same time, I have voiced the assumption that between seven and nine Pecheneg tribes could have been settled beyond the Danube (minus a tribe that moved to Paradounavon between 1074 and 1077). Meško, “Groups,” 185. The total number of warriors of these two nomad groups could have been between 60,000 and 80,000. My estimate is based on Pritsak's assumption, according to which one tribe = one *tiimen* = 10,000 warriors. See Omeljan Pritsak, “The Pečenegs: A Case of Social and Economic Transformation,” *Studies in Medieval Eurasian History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), 21. Thus, if Çelgü had half of this total at his disposal, there could have been between 30,000 and 40,000 men in his host.

<sup>259</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203): “καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ δακικοῦ στρατεύματος οὐκ ὀλίγους, ὧν ὁ οὐτὼ καλούμενος Σολομῶν δημαγωγὸς ἦν.” For the identification of the Hungarians under the archaic ethnonym Dacians in the contemporary Byzantine chronicles, see Peter Rokai, “Дачани као име Мађара у византијским изборима,” *ZRVI* 38 (1999–2000): 230; Vasilka Tărkova-Zaimova, “L'emploi des ethnica et les problèmes de la communication à Byzance,” in *Επικοινωνία στο Βυζάντιο – Πρακτικά του Β' διεθνούς συμποσίου, 4-6 Οκτωβρίου 1990*, ed. by Nikos G. Moschonas (Athens: Κέντρο vyzantinon erevnon/Ethnikó Ídryma, 1993), 705.

<sup>260</sup> A similar impression of a small number of men accompanying Solomon arises from the description of this expedition in the *Chronicon Pictum*. See Alexander Domanovszky, “Chronici hungarici compositio sæculi XIV,” in *Scriptores rerum hungaricarum*, Vol. I, ed. by E. Szentpetery (Budapest: Academia Litter. Hungarica, 1937), 408, 410.

<sup>261</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203).

invasion a year earlier, that is, the Thracian and Macedonian infantry from Adrianoupolis, *tagma* of Norman knights (of which Constantine Houmbertopoulos might still be in charge),<sup>262</sup> as well as cavalry detachments belonging to the *tagmata* from Makedonia and Thrace.<sup>263</sup> It is also likely that some of the units belonging to the imperial *tagmata*, subject to the emperor, or mercenaries stationed in Constantinople, also participated in the battle.<sup>264</sup> The commander of these forces was the emperor's younger brother *prōtosebastos* Adrianos Komnenos, whom Alexios Komnenos appointed *megas domestikos* after his return to Constantinople.<sup>265</sup> Taking into account all these assumptions and subtle clues, the Byzantine forces facing the Pechenegs could have amounted to a sufficient and battle-ready force, but their total number most probably did not exceed 10,000 men.

The opposing forces prepared for the fierce fight that soon erupted to the fullest. Intense skirmishes between battle lines raged to and fro and many wounded and dead were soon counted on both sides. On the Pecheneg side, the chief commander Çelgü was killed as he was fighting valiantly in the center of the nomad host.<sup>266</sup> His death suggests that, due to the relatively narrow battlefield surrounded by steep hillsides, the

<sup>262</sup> See text above.

<sup>263</sup> The inclusion of this detachment in the Byzantine battle order in the spring of 1087 is based on the assumption that the defeat suffered by the *tagmata* of Makedonia and Thrace under Pakourianos' leadership was not as severe as it might seem from Anna Komnene's account, and that some of the soldiers and their mounts survived the slaughter at Beliatoba unscathed. Of course, defeated *tagmata* that suffered severe casualties could not have been battle-ready for Tatikios' campaign in the autumn of 1086, but some of their subunits could already be able to take part in the fighting during the spring of 1087.

<sup>264</sup> This hypothesis is based on Anna Komnene's brief mention about soldiers who returned to the capital after the battle against the Pechenegs. *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204). If soldiers of units stationed near Constantinople are really referred to in this passage, this information provides further support for my other theory that the Pecheneg attack was not as surprising as described, and that the Byzantines had time to react and take the necessary defensive measures (again, according to the analogy to the Kuman invasion in 1095).

<sup>265</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204). Adrianos Komnenos previously played a dangerous role in the battle of Larissa against the Normans in 1083 (see text above).

<sup>266</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 158; Chalandon, *Essai*, 113; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 117; Spinei, *Migrations*, 142; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 102; Paroň, *Pechenegs*, 361.



Byzantines were able to pin down the Pechenegs and engage them in close combat. Thus they gained a huge advantage thanks to their heavier protective armor. This assumption is indirectly confirmed in the text of the *Chronicon Pictum*, according to which the Pechenegs panicked after the crushing attack of iron-clad Byzantine cavalymen and tried to escape.<sup>267</sup> Their morale was certainly shaken by the fact that Çelgü fell during the initial phase of the battle. Confused retreat, or rather rout, caused further losses in the ranks of the nomads. Stricken by utmost terror, many of them attempted to cross the stream between the Pecheneg camp and the fort of Koule, but because of the reigning chaos, they were pushed into its current by their comrades that rode behind them and were drowning by the dozen.<sup>268</sup> During the final phase of the battle, the former Hungarian king Solomon also seems to have come to an ultimate end, as he was killed with most of his entourage.<sup>269</sup>

### 5.3.3 *Struggle for Survival (1087–1091)*

It is clear that the unexpected victory over the Pechenegs strongly encouraged the emperor Alexios Komnenos to seize the opportunity and solve the problems with the Pechenegs settled in the province of Paradounavon once and for all (according to the Byzantine elites in Constantinople, on the occupied Byzantine territory).<sup>270</sup> However, it should be noted here that, based on the *Alexiad*, our only available source for these events, it is not certain at all that the large incursion that the Byzantines had just

<sup>267</sup> *Chronicon pictum*, 409: “Cum enim vidissent Cuni magnam multitudinem loricatorum, timuerunt valde ceperuntque festinare (...) priusquam ab hostibus conluderentur.”

<sup>268</sup> *Alexias*, VII.1.2. (p. 204); Madgearu, *Organization*, 139.

<sup>269</sup> Solomon’s death in 1087 is confirmed by brief mentions in western Latin sources. See Saxo, 724; Bernold, 446; Vasil’evskij, “Печенегы,” 158. See also note 44 above.

<sup>270</sup> During the eleventh century, the Byzantine border on the Danube was perceived by the social elite in Constantinople not only as a political boundary between Byzantium and its northern neighbors, but also as the northern boundary of Orthodox Christianity. Such a notion of a dividing space did not exclude the establishment of new ethnicities in the Byzantine territory, but new arrivals were required to embrace Christianity in its Orthodox form, which, in its consequences, represented a form of integration. See Stephenson, “Lower Danube,” 97–98.

managed to fend off in such a spectacular way<sup>271</sup> also involved the Paradounavon Pechenegs.<sup>272</sup> This fact appears to have played a minimal role in the emperor's decision-making at the turn of spring and summer of 1087. Alexios Komnenos had the chance to finally get rid of the troublesome and dangerous neighbors and, therefore, decided to act without undue delay.<sup>273</sup> At the end of spring 1087, almost immediately after eliminating Çelgü and his horde, the emperor initiated preparations for a major Byzantine counterattack. The overall strategic situation was indeed favorable for the Byzantines at this point, since, as mentioned several times above, the threat from the Normans in southern Italy disappeared with the death of Guiscard in 1085, and its eventual reappearance due to the weak position of his successor Roger Borsa was nowhere in sight. Thus, Alexios Komnenos was able to concentrate most of his troops in the northeastern Balkans against the Pechenegs. Moreover, nearly all of them had already been reorganized to some extent and their combat capabilities restored after suffering serious material and human losses during the war against the Normans.

The main part of the Byzantine army led by the emperor himself is believed to have set out from Constantinople in late May or early June 1087.<sup>274</sup> The town of Lardea was chosen as the starting point of the Byzantine counterattack.<sup>275</sup> The emperor and his army reached the town at a fairly comfortable marching rate via Adrianoupolis in approximately

<sup>271</sup> In her description of the events of spring 1087, Anna Komnene focused only on the military clashes of the main forces. See *Alexias*, VII.1.1. (p. 203–204). However, following the defeat of the Pecheneg horde led by Çelgü, she mentions very briefly that the Pechenegs plundered the adjacent territory in Makedonia and around Philippoupolis during their retreat and even after that continued in their inroads. Since this territory was quite far from the main area of military operations (between the town of Pamfyllos and the Koule fort on the lower Maritsa), it could have been the Paradounavon Pechenegs who took advantage of the incursion of their relatives from beyond the Danube. See *Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204).

<sup>272</sup> Stephenson assumes that Çelgü and his host passed through their territory with the consent of the leaders of the Paradounavon Pechenegs. Stephenson, *Frontier*, 102.

<sup>273</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 158–159; Chalandon, *Essai*, 113.

<sup>274</sup> For this dating of the start of the campaign, see note 276 below.

<sup>275</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 259; Chalandon, *Essai*, 113; Zlatarski, *История*, 190; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 117. Anna Komnene says that Lardea was located between the towns of Goloe (today's Lozarevo) and Diampolis (today's Jampol), but its more precise location is unknown. Identification of Lardea with today's site of Lozevec is purely hypothetical, though highly likely. See Soustal, *Thrakien*, 333.

mid-June.<sup>276</sup> Meanwhile, a squadron of the Byzantine fleet sailed off from Constantinople under the command of Georgios Euforbenos,<sup>277</sup> headed north along the Black Sea coast, and was about to enter the mouth of the Danube, thus approaching the main strategic objective of the entire

<sup>276</sup>This dating is derived from the fact that, according to Anna Komnene, at least forty days passed between the arrival of the Byzantine army in Lardea and the arrival of the Pecheneg envoys on 1 August 1087. See *Alexias*, VII.2.2. (p. 204). In order to reach Lardea in mid-June, the Byzantine army, which also included cavalry units, would have had to start their march from Constantinople as early as the end of May or at the latest in early June 1087. As a basis for this estimate, I used data from the Arabic geographer Idrīsī, who mentions various routes in Thrace, along with information concerning the distance between individual locations in miles or days of march. For example, the route between Arkadioupolis and Tzouroulon (roughly 45 km as the crow flies) corresponds in his work to forty miles, or two days of march. See Idrīsī, *Géographie*, 407. Some researchers argue that one day of march equals 15 to 30 km. See, for example, Veselin Beševliev, “Zur Geographie Nord-Ost Bulgariens in der Spätantike und im Mittelalter,” *Bulgarisch-Byzantinische Aufsätze* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978), 69. Haldon provides a figure derived from the military manual *De velitatione* of the emperor Nikeforos II Fokas stating that one day of march corresponded to a distance of 16 miles (24 km). John Haldon, “The Organization and Support of an Expeditionary Force: Manpower and Logistics in the Middle Byzantine Period,” *Byzantium at war (9th–12th c.)*, ed. by K. Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 122, note 42. Above, in connection with the transfer of the Byzantine army to Dyrrachion in autumn 1081 (see note 310 in Chap. 4), I mentioned the possibility of observing the late ancient marching standards, that is, *iter iustum* (10 Roman miles = ca. 15 km) and *iter magnum* (15 Roman miles = 22.2 km). Dimitroúkas, “Ενδείξεις,” 16. Based on this data, the march from Constantinople to Adrianoupolis could have taken the Byzantine army eight to nine days and from Adrianoupolis to Lardea at least four days, meaning that the Byzantine military forces would need at least two weeks to move from Constantinople via Adrianoupolis (with a possible one-day stop to gather additional troops from the Adrianoupolis area) to Lardea. If the Byzantine army consisted only of cavalry units (which of course was not the case), it could have moved twice as fast, as evidenced later in March 1206, when a detachment of approximately 140 knights led by the emperor Baldouin of Flanders (1204–1207) covered the distance between Constantinople and Adrianoupolis in just three days. Geoffroi de Villehardouin, *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. and transl. by Edmond Faral, vol. II (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961), 158, 160; Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 48–49.

<sup>277</sup>*Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204). Georgios Euforbenos is one of the relatively little-known Byzantine commanders and appears here in the historical narration of Anna Komnene for the first time. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 94–95. The Byzantine princess naturally does not mention either his rank or court title, and since none of his lead seals have been uncovered, it can only be assumed that this Byzantine commander held the position of *komēs tou stolou* usually reserved for a squadron commander. For this, see Böhm, *Flota*, 219.

campaign—the city of Dristra.<sup>278</sup> Anna Komnene again does not provide any information on the number of Byzantine ships involved in this operation. However, if the premise mentioned above is that Georgios Euforbenos actually held the post of *komēs tou stolou*, then the Byzantine squadron under his command could have consisted of three to five vessels.<sup>279</sup> This number is far from impressive, but it should be taken into account that the Paradounavon Pechenegs possessed no military ships at all. It is also true that, following the Norman defeat in 1085, the Byzantine navy urgently needed time to reorganize and replace the appalling losses it suffered during 1084 and 1085 (these amounted to at least seven dromons with their entire crews).<sup>280</sup> In addition, in 1086, the main forces<sup>281</sup> of the Byzantine fleet were again deployed, under the command of Manuel Boutoumites,<sup>282</sup> in the northern half of the Aegean against the naval forces of emir Abu'l-Kasim of Nikaia (1085–1092), based in the port of Kios,<sup>283</sup> and were probably still on standby during the following year of 1087. In other words, the Byzantine emperor could not have sent a stronger squadron to the lower Danube at this point even if he wanted.

<sup>278</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204) and VII.2.7. (p. 207); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 159; Chalandon, *Essai*, 113–115; Zlatarski, *История*, 190; Diaconu, *Petchenègues*, 117. Byzantine Dristra is today's city of Silistra, Bulgaria, originally ancient Durostorum/Dorostolon (the Slavic or contemporary Bulgarian name of the town is Drăstăr). The fortification of the acropolis consists of walls erected in the early ninth century during the reign of the Bulgarian khan Krum (803–814). After the Byzantines recaptured this important fortress in 1002, a second acropolis was built in the eleventh century in the southern part of the city. Dimitar Angelov and Boris Cholpanov, *Българска военна история от втората четвърт на X до втората половина на XV в* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Balgarskata akademija na naukite, 1989), 25; Madgearu, *Organization*, 112. After the establishment of the province of Paradounavon during the reign of Basileios II Bulgaroktonos, Dristra became the headquarters of its military commander (*stratēgos* and since the mid-eleventh century *doux/katepanō*). Krsmanović, *Province*, 194–195, 198.

<sup>279</sup> See note 277 above.

<sup>280</sup> For my estimate of losses in November 1084, see above. A visible manifestation of this reorganization, initiated after the end of the war against the Normans, was also the creation of a new command rank of *doux tou stolou* (or after 1092, *megas doux*) by the emperor Alexios Komnenos in 1085 or 1086, which relegated the original commander of the Byzantine navy (*droungarios tou stolou*, later *megas droungarios*) to the second position in the command hierarchy. See *Alexias*, XII.8.8. (p. 381); Böhm, *Flota*, 217; Guillard, “Marine,” 220. The first Byzantine fleet commander with this rank was probably Manuel Boutoumites. For his appointment, see *Alexias*, VI.10.5. (p. 190). For Manuel Boutoumites' person as well as his later rich career in Alexios Komnenos' service, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 181–185.

<sup>281</sup> In line with my previous estimates and after counting the projected losses, this could amount to approximately twenty dromons. See text above.

<sup>282</sup> See note 280 above.

<sup>283</sup> *Alexias*, VI.10.5. (p. 190–191); Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 68; Böhm, *Flota*, 140–141, 222.

Alexios Komnenos stayed in Lardea, waiting for other Byzantine units to gather ahead of the upcoming offensive, and devoted this time to their thorough military training.<sup>284</sup> Simultaneously, he also initiated various diplomatic activities directed against the Paradounavon Pechenegs. Unfortunately, Anna Komnene does not describe them in more detail, only remarking that they were not very successful. In line with traditions dating back to the days of ancient Rome, Alexios Komnenos' intention was to win over some of the Pecheneg chiefs so as to bring a rift into the ranks of the adversary. As shown above, the same tactics had brought him success several times during the war against the Normans when, thanks to the intense use of diplomacy, he was able to undermine Guiscard's and Bohemund's military activities. However, the emperor's attempts went unheeded this time, as none of the Pecheneg chiefs was willing to side with the Byzantines.<sup>285</sup> The scale and importance of the intended military campaign is evidenced by the fact that, at the end of its preparatory phase, Alexios Komnenos convened all his close advisers and commanders to hold a military council in order to decide definitively whether the situation for the offensive was favorable or not.<sup>286</sup> The war council was attended by (*prōto?*)*nōbelissimos* Nikeforos Bryennios,<sup>287</sup> Nikolaos Maurokatakalon,<sup>288</sup> (*prōto?*)*nōbelissimos* Georgios Palaiologos, *porfyrogennētoi* Nikeforos and Leo, sons of the former emperor Romanos IV Diogenes,<sup>289</sup> as well as *patrikios anthypatos* and *katepanō* Gregorios Maurokatakalon. In particular, the elder and more experienced of Alexios Komnenos' commanders, Nikeforos Bryennios and Gregorios Maurokatakalon, spoke out against

<sup>284</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 159. The emphasis on additional training of all divisions just before the expedition may point to the fact that there was a large number of fresh recruits in the ranks of the Byzantine army, for whom this campaign was to be the baptism by fire.

<sup>285</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.2. (p. 205).

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.2.2. (p. 204).

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.2.2. (p. 205). Nikeforos Bryennios the Elder is one of the important figures in the Byzantine history of this period. It is sufficient to say that he participated in the fateful campaign of the emperor Romanos IV Diogenes of 1071, which ended in the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert. During the uprising against the emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates, he crossed arms with the then *domestikos* of the West Alexios Komnenos at the battle of Kalavrye and was defeated. Subsequently, he was blinded and stripped of his property, although some of his assets were later returned to him. After Alexios Komnenos became the emperor, he was awarded with elevated court titles of *nōbelissimos* and later of *prōtonōbelissimos*. See Seibt, *Bleisiegeln*, 288–289. His expertise in military matters was so highly regarded by Alexios Komnenos that Bryennios, despite his blindness, accompanied the emperor in the campaign against the Pechenegs as his personal advisor. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 218–224.

<sup>288</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.3. (p. 205). See note 243 above.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.* See also text above.

waging a military campaign so deep into the enemy territory.<sup>290</sup> However, in the end, the emperor's view prevailed as it was supported by the younger and more warlike members of his entourage, because, as mentioned above, the emperor himself was firmly determined right from the beginning not to miss the chance to hit the Paradounavon Pechenegs hard.<sup>291</sup>

Meanwhile, the Pecheneg chiefs<sup>292</sup> learned about the arrival of the Byzantine naval squadron to the lower Danube,<sup>293</sup> and since they seem to have already known about Alexios Komnenos' other military preparations, they came to the correct conclusion that the Byzantine emperor was getting ready for a major military expedition against them.<sup>294</sup> Therefore, in their effort to buy more time they decided to initiate a new round of diplomatic negotiations with the emperor, trying in the meantime to secure an alliance with the Kumans, who were still lingering in the Black Sea steppes around the lower Dnieper, Siverskyi Donets, and Don rivers.<sup>295</sup> It was no coincidence that it was Tatu, the Pecheneg ruler (*exarchōn*) of Dristra, who came to the far-away Kuman dwellings pleading for military assistance.<sup>296</sup> In the meantime, a large 150-member group of Pecheneg envoys in charge

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.; Chalandon, *Essai*, 114; Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 159; Zlatarski, *История*, 190.

<sup>291</sup> It should be reiterated that, even when addressing this dilemma, it was Alexios Komnenos who ultimately had the decisive say. His strong determination to resolve the Pecheneg problem once and for all is also reflected in the opening sentence, which, according to Anna Komnene, her father said to the military council. See *Alexias*, VII.2.2. (p. 204): "οὐ χρή; λέγων, ἔκεχερίαν ὄλωσ τοῖς Σκύθαις δίδοσθαι."

<sup>292</sup> As stated above, Anna Komnene often avoids using personal names of those considered by her barbarians. The same applies to the Pecheneg (or other) rulers in Paradounavon. Besides Tatu, we know the name of a chief called Satzias settled in Bitzina located somewhere in the Danube delta (also probably of nomadic origin) and another leader named Časlav (Anna Komnene calls him Sesthlavos, which indicates the Slavic/Bulgarian origin). *Alexias*, VI.14.1. (p. 199); Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 132–133.

<sup>293</sup> The main operational base of the Byzantine squadron could, according to Madgearu, be Isaccea (ancient Noviodunum) with the residence of *katepanō* still controlling the Byzantine enclaves in Paradounavon. In connection with the 1087 campaign against the Pechenegs, it is worth noting that the lead seal of the emperor's younger brother *meġas domestikos* Adrianos Komnenos was uncovered at this site. See Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 83–84, 104–105, 138.

<sup>294</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.7. (p. 207).

<sup>295</sup> The Kumans and their settlement areas in the late eleventh century will be mentioned in more detail later. See note 528 below.

<sup>296</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.3. (p. 209); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 165; Petre Diaconu, *Les Coumans au Bas-Danube aux X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Bucarest: Académie de la République Socialiste de Roumanie, 1978), 38. In this context, a question arises: Why did Tatu undertake such a long way to the Kumans, who were also ethnically related to the Pechenegs, but nonetheless to a lesser degree than the Pechenegs living north of the Danube? In my opinion, this only demonstrates that the Byzantine victory in the spring of 1087 over the Pechenegs led by Čelġü living north of the Danube was absolute—the Pechenegs living beyond the Danube were weakened

of direct diplomatic negotiations with the Byzantines was coldly received by Alexios Komnenos in his imperial tent at Lardea in the early hours of Sunday, August 1, 1087. However, in this case, the Pecheneg chieftains did not seek military alliance (as Tatu did with the Kumans), but instead offered it to the Byzantine emperor themselves. On the condition that the emperor called off the military campaign, the Paradounavon Pechenegs were willing to make peace and, if necessary, provide the Byzantine emperor with a military unit of up to 30,000 Pecheneg warriors as allies (*symmachoi*).<sup>297</sup> Anna Komnene argues that by making such a tempting offer, the Pechenegs only wanted to buy enough time to complete their own military preparations, and states flatly that the emperor himself eventually saw through this plan.<sup>298</sup> Therefore, after a while, he not only rejected the proposal as insincere but also had all the envoys immediately taken prisoner.<sup>299</sup> *Prōtoproedros* Leo Nikerites<sup>300</sup> was then ordered to escort the captives to Constantinople.<sup>301</sup>

The purely military part of the campaign against Dristra itself probably started about five days later, around 6 August 1087.<sup>302</sup> The first stop of the Byzantine army was the town of Goloe, where the unsettling news of the escape of the Pecheneg captives reached the Byzantine emperor. On their

militarily to such a degree that their allies living south of the Danube could no longer find any support from them and had to seek new allies at the much more distant Kumans.

<sup>297</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.7. (p. 207); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 159–160; Chalandon, *Essai*, 114; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 117; Malamut, "Image," 136; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 362. It was apparently an attempt to promise a return to the *status quo* before 1072, when parts of the Paradounavon province, under the rule of the Pecheneg chiefs, became independent and the terms of the 1053 peace treaty were nullified.

<sup>298</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.8. (p. 207); Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 362.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.2.9. (p. 208); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 160; Chalandon, *Essai*, 114; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*.

<sup>300</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.9. (p. 208). Leo Nikerites was an eunuch, but some sources present him as an experienced and courageous military commander. Enough data is known about his career, both from historical and sigillographic sources. In the 1070s, he held the title of *bestarchbēs* and a little later, at the turn of the 1070s and 1080s, he was a *proedros*. By 1087, he became *prōtoproedros* and *anagrafeus* of Pelopones and after the final victory of the Byzantines over the Pechenegs in 1091 he was awarded the court title of *kouropalatēs* and at the same time became the commander (*doux*) of the restored and unified province of Paradounavon. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 179–180; Ivan Jordanov, "The Katepanate of Paradounavon according to the sphragistic Data," *SBS* 8 (2003): 67–68; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 308–309; Valentina S. Shandrovskaia, "Некоторые исторические деятели 'Алексиады' и их печати," *Palestinskij sbornik* 23 (1971): 41–42; Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 84.

<sup>301</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.9. (p. 208).

<sup>302</sup> For this date see note 304 below.

way to captivity, near Little Nikaia,<sup>303</sup> the Pecheneg prisoners managed to take advantage of the inattention of their guards at night. They killed some of them and took flight north of the Haimos to their fellow tribesmen.<sup>304</sup> Nevertheless, the emperor decided to continue in the march, although the escape of the envoys meant that the Paradounavon Pechenegs would learn about the advance of the Byzantine army northward. On the second day of the campaign (around 8 August 1087), the Byzantine army crossed the Haimos mountains via the Sidera pass and entered the territory of the former province of Paradounavon.<sup>305</sup> In the evening, the Byzantines set up their a camp on the banks of the Bitzina river,<sup>306</sup> where the first skirmish with the Pechenegs soon occurred. Small groups of nomads ambushed, killed, or captured individual Byzantine soldiers who dared to move away from the camp while looking for fresh fodder for horses and mules.<sup>307</sup> The same happened the following evening, when the

<sup>303</sup> Little Nikaia, or Nike, was located on the route between Adrianoupolis and Boulgarofygon in Thrace (today's Babaeski); today, the Turkish city of Havsa is located there. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 374–375

<sup>304</sup> *Alexias*, VII.2.9. (p. 208). At this point, Anna Komnene's text contains contradictory pieces of information, because the reader first gets the impression that the Byzantine army was still encamped in Lardea when Alexios learned of the escape of the Pecheneg prisoners, and that the start of the campaign was actually the direct result of this unfavorable news (*Alexias*, VII.3.1. (p. 208)). However, on the basis of the same text, Leo Nikerites personally informed the emperor of the failure of his mission in Goloe (*Ibid.*, VII.2.9. (p. 208)). This means that the military expedition against the Pechenegs began independently of the outcome of Leo Nikerites' mission, and that the Byzantine units were already on the march, but probably only for one day, because Goloe is only about 24 km away from Lardea. Based on the fact that the bad news was reported to the emperor by Leo Nikerites himself, that the distance between Lardea and Little Nikaia was so short, and that Nikerites and his captives traveled on horseback, we can assume that the entire mission, including the escape of prisoners and the return of Nikerites from Little Nikaia to the emperor in Goloe, could have taken him approximately six days. Finally, if Leo Nikerites were to set off with the captives as early as 1 August 1087, he would inform the emperor of the prisoners' escape some six days later, on 7 August. If these assumptions were correct, then it would be hypothetically possible to determine the date of departure of the Byzantine army from Lardea, and thus the start of the whole campaign against the Pechenegs on 6 August 1087.

<sup>305</sup> However, according to the hypotheses described above, the Byzantine army was still, at least in theory, marching on the Byzantine territory, as these enclaves in Paradounavon remained under Byzantine administration even after Nestor's uprising. See text above.

<sup>306</sup> Not to be confused with the town of Bitzina, which was probably located somewhere near the mouth of the Danube. Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 135–136. The Ticha river, or the Golyama Kamchija in present-day northeastern Bulgaria, has been reliably identified as Bitzina (in Bulgarian apparently as Dičina). Beševliev, "Geographie," 69; Zlatarski, *История*, 192; Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 134.

<sup>307</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.1. (p. 208–209); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 161; Zlatarski, *История*, 192.



Byzantine army encamped near the ruins of the former first Bulgarian capital of Pliska.<sup>308</sup> The nomadic tactics of ambushes did not stop the Byzantine advance, though, so two days later the Byzantine army was less than five kilometers away from Dristra, where it began to build a camp on the bank of a small Danube tributary.<sup>309</sup> A smaller Pecheneg group took them by surprise again, sweeping through the Byzantine camp, causing panic and chaos everywhere. This attack was eventually fended off largely thanks to the Paulikians fighting together with the emperor's personal guard.<sup>310</sup> The next day, the Byzantines set off from the camp and advanced to Dristra. The siege machines were set up without delay and the city was put under a siege.<sup>311</sup>

After a brief, yet intense fight, Dristra fell into Byzantine hands.<sup>312</sup> However, both citadels<sup>313</sup> defended by the Pechenegs under the command of Tatu's relatives continued to resist. In addition, the Pechenegs retained

<sup>308</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.1. (p. 209); Zlatarski, *История*, 192. The route along which the imperial army advanced from Adrianoupolis to Dristra is also indicated by the imperial seals and depots of gold Byzantine coins found on the sites of Golyam Izvor, Melnitsa, Zlati Voyvoda, Preslav, Kirkovo, Drandar, Vodno, Gurgendzhik, Ishirkovo, and Păcuil lui Soare. Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 138.

<sup>309</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.2. (p. 209). This Danube tributary cannot be further identified. The distance noted by Anna Komnene of 24 *stadia* is equivalent to 4.8 km, provided that one ancient *στάδιον* equals 200 meters. See Malamut, "Image," 137; Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 138. However, this distance is too short, considering that the total length of the route between Dristra and Pliska is about 90 km. So, if the Byzantine army were to reach a point about 4.8 km from Dristra after one day of march, it would have to march an incredible distance of 85.2 km. However, as explained elsewhere (see note 313 in Chap. 4), Anna Komnene seems to have used the ancient *στάδιον* in the meaning of the Roman mile, which was used as a unit to measure distance even in the Byzantine period. In this case, the distance of 24 *stadia* (in fact Roman miles) would suddenly increase to 35.52 km. Yet, despite this alteration, Byzantine soldiers would still have to cover a considerable distance of around 55 km in one day. Also, the 36 km distance of the camp from Dristra is at best illogical, and perhaps, after all, the Byzantine camp was located less than 5 km from the city. Based on these facts, it can be assumed that Anna Komnene, in her detailed description of the route of the Byzantine army, failed to count at least one complete day, and that in order to cover the distance between Pliska and Dristra, Byzantine soldiers needed not two but at least three or more days of marching.

<sup>310</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.2. (p. 209); Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 392; Birkenmeier, *Арму*, 72.

<sup>311</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.2. (p. 209); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 161; Zlatarski, *История*, 193.

<sup>312</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 116.

<sup>313</sup> See note 278 above.

their control over the heights located south and southwest of the city,<sup>314</sup> allowing them from time to time to carry out successful and sufficiently disruptive surprise attacks against the Byzantines who were busy with the siege.<sup>315</sup> Aware of this disadvantage, as well as the fact that the arrival of the main Pecheneg forces to help Dristra was only a matter of time, Alexios Komnenos decided to lift the siege, retreat from the city, and set up a base in a safer location, probably south of Dristra. The aim of this withdrawal from the combat zone was to reorganize his military forces and allow his units to get some rest before the decisive battle.<sup>316</sup> After the camp was built and secured, the emperor convened a brief war council of chief commanders to discuss the overall situation and, in particular, whether it was an appropriate time to risk a decisive battle with the Pechenegs. As was the case a few days earlier, the opinion of Alexios Komnenos' younger and more warlike commanders again prevailed over the cautious views of

<sup>314</sup>In 971, the Byzantine camp was probably located on the same hill during the campaign of the emperor John I Tzimiskes against the Prince Svyatoslav of Kievan Rus' (964–972). See Haldon, *Wars*, 123.

<sup>315</sup>*Alexias*, VII.3.3. (p. 209–210).

<sup>316</sup>Malamut, "Image," 137; *Alexias*, VII.3.3. (p. 210). In my older article, I assumed that the Byzantine army retreated from Dristra westward. Meško, "Výprava," 113, note 42. This assumption was based on the fact that the Vetren fortress on the bank of the Danube, mentioned by Anna Komnene, is located west of Dristra. The emperor sent his imperial tent and baggage train under the leadership of Georgios Koutzomites the evening before the battle to Vetren, apparently to board the ships of the imperial squadron. See *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211). I wrongly supposed that the rest of the army followed suit later. For more information on the Vetren fort, see Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 112–113. However, recent archaeological findings clearly show that the Byzantines actually withdrew from Dristra to the south (as Vasil'evskij assumed, albeit for a wrong reason; see Vasil'evskij, "Печенери," 162) and encamped in the wider surroundings of today's Dulovo (located approx. 25 to 30 km southwest of Dristra), that is, somewhere between Dulovo and Dristra. Bulgarian archaeologists at this site uncovered several sets of objects indicating the exact location of the Byzantine camp as well as the battle itself, mainly objects of a military nature (various types of weapons, parts of horse harnesses and cavalry equipment, etc.), as well as the complete equipment of the "field" blacksmith's forge, which apparently belonged to the baggage train of the Byzantine army. See Joto Jotov and Georgi N. Nikolov, "Походът на Алексий I Комнин към Дръстър (1087 г.): Нови данни и интерпретация," *Пътуванията в средновековна България. Материали от първата национална конференция Пътуване към България, пътуванията в средновековна България и съвременният туризъм Шумен, 8.-11. 5. 2008 г.* (Veliko Trnovo, 2009), 438. Unfortunately, the data in this study is only general and does not reveal the exact location of the site. See also Valery Yotov, "The Traces of the Presence of Scandinavian Warriors in the Balkans," *Byzantium and the Viking World*, ed. by Fedir Androshchuk, Jonathan Shephard, and Monica White (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2016), 252.

Georgios Palaiologos and Gregorios Maurokatakalon. Both experienced commanders suggested to the emperor that the army retreat even farther south and withdraw to the safety of the walls of (Great) Preslav and from this strong position continue to threaten the Pechenegs.<sup>317</sup> Over the next night, despite the emperor's strict ban on illuminating the camp,<sup>318</sup> the approaching Pechenegs were able to track down the Byzantine troops, and their main forces took positions within sight of the Byzantine camp at the dawn.<sup>319</sup> Under such conditions, proposed withdrawal farther south was no longer possible and the battle between the Byzantines and the Paradounavon Pechenegs became inevitable. Thus, on the morning of 14 August 1087,<sup>320</sup> Alexios Komnenos ordered the troops to pull out of the encampment and form a tight battle formation with its front facing the

<sup>317</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.4. (p. 210); Chalandon, *Essai*, 116; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 118; Zlatarski, *История*, 193. The proposal of Georgios Palaiologos and Gregorios Maurokatakalon does not necessarily imply that Byzantine soldiers would have to conquer the city upon arrival under the walls of Preslav. Conversely, this more or less automatic assumption by most historians that Preslav was in the hands of the Pechenegs in the summer of 1087 seems mistaken, since the lifting of one siege (Dristra), the subsequent march through enemy territory, and, finally, the initiation of a second siege (Preslav) would represent, from a military point of view, a sequence of incomprehensible maneuvers that would worsen rather than improve the position of the Byzantine army. In this context, the verb *katalambanein* means to “reach” or “enter,” as had already been the case in the aforementioned transfer of the Byzantine army from Constantinople via Adrianoupolis to Lardea, during which the emperor “καταλαμβάνει τὴν Ἀδριανούπολιν,” that is, reaches the city of Adrianoupolis. Adrianoupolis was in Byzantine hands at the time, so the verb here certainly does not mean to “seize” or “conquer.” See *Alexias*, VII.2.1. (p. 204). There are several such examples in the text of the *Alexiad*. This detail supports Madgearu's argument about the Byzantine presence in Preslav before the summer of 1087. According to his hypothesis, Preslav was then under *katapanikion* with the seat in Mesembria (today's Nesebăr). See Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 429. Similar conclusions are made on the basis of archaeological findings in Preslav itself, where no archaeological evidence of interruption of the Byzantine presence during the eleventh century has yet been found. See Peter Frankopan, “The Working of Byzantine Provincial Administration in the 10th–12th Centuries: the Example of Preslav,” *Byzantion* 71 (2001–2002): 96.

<sup>318</sup> Soldiers were strictly forbidden to make fires or light wooden beams. *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211).

<sup>319</sup> Although Anna Komnene does not describe it literally like this, only in this way can we explain the emperor's actions at night before the battle, the apparent aim of which was to prevent a hostile night attack. See *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211). Therefore, it can be assumed that the Pechenegs had already been in close proximity to the Byzantine camp.

<sup>320</sup> This dating is only indicative and valid if the Byzantine army actually left Lardea on the morning of 6 August 1087. See note 304 above. As a result, it would be possible to date the siege of Dristra to approximately 12 and 13 August, and finally the battle of Dristra would take place on the day mentioned above, that is, on Saturday, 14 August 1087.

Pechenegs.<sup>321</sup> The emperor took his position in the center, together with his personal guard<sup>322</sup> and an unknown number of relatives and armed servants of the imperial household,<sup>323</sup> the *tagma* of Norman mercenaries under the command of Alexios' younger brother, *megas domestikos* and *prōtosebastos* Adrianos Komnenos,<sup>324</sup> probably also the *tagma* of the Paulikians,<sup>325</sup> as well as the *tagma* of the Varangians.<sup>326</sup> The left wing of the Byzantine army was commanded by *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos<sup>327</sup> and the right wing by experienced commanders, *megas primikērios* Tatikios and *bestarchēs* Niketas Kastamonites.<sup>328</sup> The left flank was probably formed by the *tagma* from Thessaly, and the right by the *tagma* from Makedonia

<sup>321</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211); Zlatarski, *История*, 194.

<sup>322</sup> The emperor's personal guard consisted of six members—both brothers Leo and Nikeforos Diogenai, Nikolaos Maurokatakalon, Basileios Kourtikios, Nampites, who was the commander of the Varangian guard, and finally Goules, one of the long-time servants of the imperial family. See *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Zlatarski, *История*, 194; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 73.

<sup>323</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211).

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*; Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162. The aforementioned Adrianos Komnenos was appointed to this command post to fight the Pechenegs after the death of *megas domestikos* Gregorios Pakourianos in 1086. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 5–8. A seal on which Adrianos Komnenos is titled *prōtosebastos* and *megas domestikos pasēs dyseōs* has been preserved. Georges Zacos and Alexander Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, vol. 1, part 3, no. 1497–1500. For sigillographic material related to his person, see Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 1, 79–80; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 218–220; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 3, 211, 366; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue*, 6–7.

<sup>325</sup> Their presence in the center of the Byzantine formation stems from the above episode, when they fought in the immediate vicinity of the emperor during one of the Pecheneg attacks on the Byzantine camp. See note 310 above.

<sup>326</sup> Anna Komnene does not mention the Varangian guard as such during the expedition; she only mentions the presence of its commander Nampites. However, the real presence of at least part of the Varangian guard was unambiguously confirmed only recently by archaeological finds directly on the battlefield, where weapons (battle axes, swords, spears, lances, etc.) or other objects (buckets, forgings, blacksmith's utilities, ceramics, etc.) of Scandinavian origin were uncovered. Jotov and Nikolov, "Дръстър," 438; D'Amato and Rava, *Guard*, 36, 39, 45.

<sup>327</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 73.

<sup>328</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 73. For more on Niketas Kastamonites, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 249–250. The course of his career can be traced from the preserved lead seals. Kastamonites held the honorary title of *bestarchēs* until 1094, and then he began to move up the court hierarchy. The highest rank he achieved was that of *prōtokouropalatēs*. See Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 196–198.

and Thrace.<sup>329</sup> As a reserve or a security unit to protect the rear and flanks of the Byzantine formation against the flanking maneuvers of the Pechenegs, there was another unit of *ethnikoi* (i.e., foreigners, possibly Turkish Uzes),<sup>330</sup> who were jointly commanded by reliable *kouropalatēs* Argyros Karatzas (Karadja)<sup>331</sup> and his second-in-command Ouzas.<sup>332</sup> The Byzantine army could have had an estimated numerical strength of 15,000 men in total.<sup>333</sup>

The Pecheneg leaders also arranged their warriors into the combat formation. In accordance with their military traditions and customs, they grouped into several small detachments of mounted archers, forming a close phalanx, which from a distance looked like a single mass.<sup>334</sup> On the sides, were positioned highly mobile groups of horse archers who, at the

<sup>329</sup>The assumption that the right wing of the Byzantine army consisted of Makedonian and Thracian units is based on the fact that it was commanded by Tatikios, who seems to have been in charge of this *tagma* even earlier (in the summer of 1086). See Birkenmeier, *Army*, 73. As for the left wing, the *tagma* from Thessaly may have been under the command of Nikeforos Melissenos based on the fact that he was the *doux* of Thessalonica, the then administrative center of the Byzantine Thessaly. By virtue of his status, he was able to put the unit on alert and march with it to Adrianoupolis, where he met the rest of the Byzantine army led by the emperor.

<sup>330</sup>Vasil'evskij, "Печенегы," 162; Zlatarski, *История*, 194. Birkenmeier assumes that these were light cavalry units of unknown origin, trained to fight in the fashion of the nomadic peoples. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 73.

<sup>331</sup>*Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211). In the course of this campaign, Argyros Karatzas commanded the units of the *ethnikoi*, that is, groups of foreign warriors (in this case, the Uzes) settled on the Byzantine territory. Both Karatzas and Ouzas came from the nomadic peoples of the Sarmatians (Sauromats), as Anna Komnene anachronically names them, who can be quite safely identified as the Turkish Uzes. See text above. The career of this nomad warrior in Byzantine services is known in rough contours thanks to the findings of his lead seals. Until 1092, Argyros Karatzas held a fairly exalted court title of *kouropalatēs*. See Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 188–190; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 3, 175. See also text below.

<sup>332</sup>*Alexias*, VII.3.6. (p. 211). Ouzas had previously distinguished himself in the battle of Larissa in 1083 against the Normans; see note 590 in Chap. 4.

<sup>333</sup>It is clear from the calculation of the Byzantine troops that could have taken part in the battle of Dristra that Alexios Komnenos managed to assemble the majority of the Byzantine forces for the expedition against the Pechenegs. When we compare the composition of the Byzantine army at Dristra in August 1087 with the army at Dyrrachion in 1081, we can conclude that, except for the *Exkoubitai* and the *Bestiaritai* (2000 men), the Armenian infantry, and the Seljuk allies (2000 men), all other troops from the battle of Dyrrachion also took part in the battle of Dristra. Since the size of the Byzantine army at the battle of Dyrrachion is estimated between 18,000 and 20,000 men (see text above), it is very likely that, this time, the Byzantine army was about 15,000 men strong.

<sup>334</sup>*Alexias*, VII.3.7. (p. 211); Malamut, "Image," 137.

appropriate moment, were ready to strike the enemy from the side or from the rear so as to break the battle formation, or to lure some of the enemy units out by feigning a flight, and then turn around and ambush them.<sup>335</sup> Behind the main bulk of the nomadic host, there were women, children, and other relatives of fighters on large four-wheeled wagons<sup>336</sup> with spare horses behind.<sup>337</sup> If necessary, those wagons could be arranged so as to serve as a kind of a wagon fort behind which the Pecheneg warriors could take a rest, regroup, and change their mounts, if they felt too pressed by the enemy advance, and then attack anew.<sup>338</sup> In spite of the fact that the Pechenegs were unable to gather all their military forces that morning, they certainly outnumbered the Byzantine soldiers by a fair margin. However, a more accurate determination of the numerical strength of the nomad host based on Anna Komnene's narration is not possible.

The Pechenegs soon advanced within shooting range and showered the static Byzantine battle formation with volleys of arrows (the Byzantine soldiers were ordered not to charge against the Pechenegs before the fight began because such a move would compromise the coherence of the

<sup>335</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.7. (p. 211).

<sup>336</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212). The nomads traveled over the steppe on these two- to four-wheeled wagons, which they used mainly as their homes. Many were so large that their decks could hold round *ger* tents, often mistakenly referred to as *yurt*. Pletneva, "Печенеги," 203. For more details on *ger* tents, see Karasulas and McBride, *Archers*, 16–17. It is possible that the Pecheneg wagons carried these tents also during the battle of Dristra. A detailed description of such large wagons laden with tents can be found in the work of the Arab geographer and traveler Ibn-Battûta from the mid-fourteenth century: "*Les habitants de cette contrée les appellent 'arababs, et ce sont des chariots dont chacun est pourvu de quatre grandes roues. Il y en a qui sont trainés par deux chevaux, ou même d'avantage; des bœufs et des chameaux les traient également, selon la pesanteur ou la légèreté du char. (...) On place sur le chariot une espèce de pavillon, fait de baguettes de bois liées ensemble avec des minces lanières de cuir. Cette sorte de tente est très légère, elle est recouverte de feutre ou de drap, et il y a des fenêtres grillés (...) Ceux de ces chariots qui portent les bagages, les provisions de route et les magasins de vivres sont recouverts d'un pavillon pareil, fermant par une serrure.*" Ibn Battûta, *Voyages, II, de la Mecque aux steppes russes et à l'Inde* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 205–206.

<sup>337</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Zlatarski, *История*, 194; Malamut, "Image," 137. The presence of women and children in the nomadic host does not necessarily mean a migratory movement. See Shepard, "Disinformation," 262. Women and children were usually tasked with taking care of horses and other domestic animals also during combat operations. Karasulas and McBride, *Archers*, 55; Dennis and Gamillscheg, *Strategikon*, 362.

<sup>338</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.7. (p. 211–212). The shape of the Pecheneg wagon fort was mostly circular or oval. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 72.

Byzantine battle formation).<sup>339</sup> A bloody and ferocious battle soon broke out, lasting most of the day.<sup>340</sup> Unfortunately, Anna Komnene gives very few details about its course and notes only heavy casualties on both sides as a result of the repeated efforts of both sides to break the enemy formation by frontal assaults.<sup>341</sup> The biggest losses seem to have been suffered by the units of the Byzantine center, as they faced the impenetrable Pecheneg wagon fort. The intensity of the combat in this part of the formation is evidenced, for example, by the fact that *porfyrogennētos* Leo Diogenes, who fought in the ranks of the emperor's personal guard, was killed in the fierce fight with the Pechenegs defending their wagons.<sup>342</sup> During another Byzantine attack launched against the wagon fort, the entire *tagma* of Norman mercenaries was virtually wiped out and *prōtosebastos* Adrianos Komnenos returned to the Byzantine battle line with only seven cavalymen left.<sup>343</sup>

Nevertheless, neither side was able to gain the upper hand in the battle.<sup>344</sup> However, late in the afternoon, strong Pecheneg reinforcements started to arrive at the battlefield.<sup>345</sup> Such a view must have demoralized the so far brave and disciplined Byzantine soldiers.<sup>346</sup> At this crucial moment, Alexios Komnenos attempted to restore the crumbling fighting spirit of his soldiers by an act of utmost personal bravery. With a small unit of only twenty or so cavalymen (apparently his personal guard and a few other soldiers), the emperor rode forward to the front of the entire Byzantine combat formation, holding in his hand a rare holy relic—the

<sup>339</sup> From the description by the Byzantine princess, it can be assumed that when Alexios saw the Pecheneg formation from afar, he observed it carefully and made several last-minute modifications to the structure of the Byzantine combat formation in order to face the impending onslaught of the nomads more effectively. Yet, the nature of these changes is unknown. See *Alexias*, VII.3.7. (p. 212). See also Birkenmeier, *Army*, 73.

<sup>340</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 74.

<sup>341</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Zlatarski, *История*, 194.

<sup>342</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 119.

<sup>343</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162.

<sup>344</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162.

<sup>345</sup> Anna Komnene reports that these reinforcements were 36,000-strong, which is clearly exaggerated. *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Chalandon, *Essai*, 116; Zlatarski, *История*, 194; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 119. Interestingly, this figure is the only direct numerical reference concerning the size of the opposing force at the battle of Dristra.

<sup>346</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.8. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 162; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 74.

*maforion* of the Virgin Mary—as his standard. But the Pechenegs were already winning and started to pursue the retreating Byzantines, so this courageous yet desperate act would not have any impact on the final outcome of the battle. Soon, after the repeated pleas of his brother-in-law *prōtostratōr* and *sebastos* Michael Doukas,<sup>347</sup> the emperor was forced to follow his soldiers and retreat.<sup>348</sup> In order not to fall into captivity, he even had to hide the relic in an improvised shelter somewhere in the bush as the strong gusts of wind made it impossible for him to hold it firmly while riding.<sup>349</sup>

It is more than likely that most of the Byzantine soldiers died during the final phase of the battle directly on the battlefield or during the subsequent chaotic stampede.<sup>350</sup> The defeated Byzantines seem to have fled primarily south toward the Rishki and Varbishki passes.<sup>351</sup> During their long retreat, they were vigorously harassed by the Pechenegs, even several days after the battle.<sup>352</sup> While some of the Byzantine commanders, such as Georgios Palaiologos<sup>353</sup> or the emperor, finally managed to shake off the pursuing Pechenegs and get to safety in the town of Beroe,<sup>354</sup> other senior Byzantine

<sup>347</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.9. (p. 212). *Prōtostratōr* Michael Doukas was the brother of Alexios Komnenos' wife, the empress Eirene. For his person and career, as well as the findings of lead seals associated with this period of his career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 202–205; Bulgakova, *Bleisiegel*, 102–105; Demetrios Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London: Athlone Press, 1968), 63–66. He also took part in the battle of Larissa; see text and note 521 in Chap. 2.

<sup>348</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.9. (p. 212); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 162; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 119; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 362.

<sup>349</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.12. (p. 214); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 162–163; Chalandon, *Essai*, 116; Malamut, “Image,” 137. Anna Komnene's phrasing suggests that the *maforion* (type of cloth mantle covering shoulders and head) of the Virgin Mary was hung on a pole as a military standard. Before the campaign against the Pechenegs, this rare relic had been stored in the church of St Mary in Blachernae. It was brought to Constantinople in around 466 at the behest of Verina, wife of the emperor Leo I. (457–474). See Malamut, *Alexis*, 98–99.

<sup>350</sup> Tossed weapons and various parts of horse harnesses (most often stirrups and spurs) were uncovered directly on the battlefield. Jotov and Nikolov, “Дръстър,” 438–439.

<sup>351</sup> This is evidenced by the archeological findings of scattered horse harness components (stirrups, spurs) in these two locations. Jotov and Nikolov, “Дръстър” 439.

<sup>352</sup> For instance, Georgios Palaiologos was pursued by the nomads for a total of eleven days before finding safe refuge with a widow. *Alexias*, VII.4.3. (p. 216).

<sup>353</sup> The description of Georgios Palaiologos' escape is one of the most vivid episodes of the *Alexiad*. See *Alexias*, VII.4.1. to VII.4.3. (p. 215–216); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 163.

<sup>354</sup> *Alexias*, VII.3.12. (p. 214); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 163; Chalandon, *Essai*, 116; Zlatarski, *История*, 194; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 119; Malamut, “Image,” 138; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 74. The town of Beroe is today's Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. Soustal, *Thracien*, 203–205.



commanders, such as *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos, were not so lucky and fell into captivity along with many rank-and-file soldiers.<sup>355</sup> The Pecheneg chiefs originally intended to slay all the captives without mercy,<sup>356</sup> but eventually had to yield to the general opinion of their fellow warriors, who, in an attempt to gain a greater share of the spoils of war, insisted on keeping the captured Byzantines and exchanging them for ransom.<sup>357</sup> Anna Komnene does not specify the number of prisoners, but their quantity is evidenced by the fact that the emperor had to send the required amount of money from the state treasury in Constantinople because the funds located in the area (in the town of Beroe) were utterly not sufficient.<sup>358</sup>

Thus, the unsuccessful military campaign of the Byzantines against the Paradounavon Pechenegs in August 1087 not only failed to lead to the desired neutralization of a dangerous adversary of the Byzantine Empire, but even opened up the road to the Pechenegs to carry out their marauding incursions into the area south of the Haimos mountains.<sup>359</sup> Alexios Komnenos was well aware of the seriousness of the situation. As soon as he arrived in Beroe, he tried to form a combat-ready force out of the soldiers who survived the battle of Dristra and were able to return to the Byzantine territory.<sup>360</sup> However, it was clear that in such a short period of time even this desperate measure could not bear fruit, as Byzantine units were in a state of disorder as a result of the crushing defeat.<sup>361</sup> Fortunately for the Byzantines, the Pecheneg advance south of the Haimos was temporarily halted by the Kumans, who appeared on the lower Danube for the fourth time since 1078 (they had appeared in the Balkans in 1078, 1080, 1083, and now in 1087). The reason for their arrival was the aforementioned mission of the Pecheneg chief of Dristra, Tatu, who left Paradounavon before the start of the Byzantine attack to seek military assistance from the Kumans. The Kumans readily accepted his proposals and with their host probably set out from their dwellings to the area of

<sup>355</sup> *Alexias*, VII.4.4. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 164; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 119.

<sup>356</sup> *Alexias*, VII.4.4. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 164; Chalandon, *Essai*, 117; Zlatarski, *История*, 194.

<sup>357</sup> *Alexias*, VII.4.4. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 164; Chalandon, *Essai*, 117.

<sup>358</sup> *Alexias*, VII.4.4. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 164; Zlatarski, *История*, 195.

<sup>359</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 116–117; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 362.

<sup>360</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.1. (p. 218); Chalandon, *Essai*, 116.

<sup>361</sup> Malamut, "Image," 138.

lower Danube in mid-September 1087.<sup>362</sup> Yet, in the meantime, the Pechenegs were able to defeat the Byzantines on their own and no longer needed the military assistance of the Kumans. The Kuman chiefs, who surely noticed the size of the plunder and spoils gathered in the Pecheneg camp, as well as the possible arrival of the first Byzantine ransom payments for captured soldiers, began asking their Pecheneg allies to hand over at least part of the spoils as a compensation for their long and strenuous journey.<sup>363</sup> However, the Pechenegs unwisely refused their demands. Soon, a fight broke out between them, resulting in the Pecheneg defeat. The losers were forced to run and find a temporary refuge in a marshy and inaccessible location called by Anna Komnene Ozolimne (probably today's island on the Danube named Balta Ialomitei).<sup>364</sup> Fortunately for the

<sup>362</sup> *Alexias*, VII.5.1. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 164. The distance between the area of the lower Dnieper and the lower Don and the mouth of the Danube is approximately 700 km. In theory, a horseman could cover this distance in two weeks (provided he rides at least 50 km a day). Thus, if Tatu set off from Dristra to seek help at the Kumans at the end of July 1087 (around the same time when the 150-member delegation was negotiating with Alexios Komnenos in his camp near Lardea), he could have arrived at the Kumans by the end of August. Tatu's journey back with the Kuman host also must have taken about two weeks, so the Kumans seem to have reached the lower Danube no earlier than in mid-September 1087. The timeline of Tatu's journey also corresponds to the conditions in the steppe north of the Sea of Azov, which is almost impassable in the summer months due to severe droughts and lack of water for horsemen. Moreover, for the same reason, there were almost no people in the area, because the nomads usually spent this time with their flocks on summer pastures lying more to the north, upstream of the Dnieper and the Siverskyi Donets rivers. Therefore, if Tatu had come to the steppe on the lower Siverskyi Donets river in the middle of summer, he simply would not have been able to find the Kumans there (this valuable information was kindly provided to me during a personal discussion with Professor Renata Holod of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia).

<sup>363</sup> *Alexias*, VII.5.1. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 164; Chalandon, *Essai*, 117; Zlatarski, *История*, 195; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 119; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 39; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 362.

<sup>364</sup> *Alexias*, VII.5.2. (p. 216); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 165; Chalandon, *Essai*, 117; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 228; Spinei, *Migrations*, 143. Diaconu originally identified Ozolimne with the area around the towns of Pliska and Preslav in today's northeastern Bulgaria, which was much more humid in the Middle Ages, with more lakes and marshes located there than today. See Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 121–129; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 39. However, younger historians agree that the site of Ozolimne should be searched for in a marshy area on the lower Danube, where the large island of Balta Ialomitei (with an area of 831.3 km<sup>2</sup>) is located. This island covered with marshes and lakes could have served better as a refuge for the defeated Pechenegs than the area around Preslav. Moreover, it better matches Anna Komnene's description. See Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 138–139.

Pechenegs, the large Kuman host could not remain in the lower Danube region for long due to the lack of food and supplies. Nevertheless, the Kuman chiefs did not say their final words, as they intended to return after replenishing their supplies to settle their quarrel with the Pechenegs.<sup>365</sup>

For the Byzantines, the unexpected Kuman intervention provided only a short respite. Moreover, the emperor Alexios Komnenos himself watched the unexpected arrival of the large Kuman host with great concern. Now, he had to take into account not only the well-known military potential of the Paradounavon Pechenegs, but also the incalculable and menacing mass of still relatively unknown Kumans.<sup>366</sup> In this situation, he decided it was time to leave Beroe and, at the head of the partially reorganized Byzantine troops, withdraw to Adrianoupolis.<sup>367</sup> Shortly, the disturbing news of the new Pecheneg advance reached him there—the Pechenegs had taken advantage of the departure of the Kumans, crossed the Sidera pass, and encamped near the town of Markellai.<sup>368</sup> The Byzantine emperor apparently did not dare to engage them with the remnants of his defeated army. Instead, he sent a diplomatic mission to the Pecheneg chiefs with *prōtoproedros* Nikolaos(?) Synesios at the head of the embassy.<sup>369</sup> Synesios' task was to negotiate peace with the Pechenegs and to make them leave Thrace. To reach this end, Synesios was authorized to promise them permanent control of all the territories north of the Haimos and a yearly

<sup>365</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 165; Chalandon, *Essai*, 117; Shepard, "Disinformation," 262–265.

<sup>366</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 118; Szilvia Kovács, "The Cuman Campaigns in 1091," *Golden Horde Review* 1, no. 3 (2014): 176–177.

<sup>367</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.1. (p. 218); Chalandon, *Essai*, 118; Zlatarski, *История*, 196.

<sup>368</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.2. (p. 218); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 247; Chalandon, *Essai*, 118; Zlatarski, *История*, 196; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 130; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 363.

<sup>369</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.2. (p. 218). In the text of the *Alexiad*, Synesios is referred to only in connection with the events of the war against the Pechenegs, and his main domain seems to have been diplomacy. See also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 285–286. Seals of a certain Nikolaos Synesios (the last name is almost illegible, however), dating back to the last third of the eleventh century, have been uncovered. One of them was found on the territory of present-day Bulgaria in the village of Melnitsa, not far from the site of the Byzantine-Pecheneg encounter. Jordanov assumes that the above-mentioned *prōtoproedros* Nikolaos Synesios could be identical to Synesios referred to by Anna Komnene. See Ivan Jordanov, "Byzantine Seals from the Village of Melnitsa," *SBS* 7 (2002): 49; Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 3, 210–211.

tribute payment from Byzantium.<sup>370</sup> He was also probably instructed to secure an alliance with the Pechenegs against the Kumans (perhaps in the form of the Pecheneg proposal made before the start of the campaign), provided they withdraw to the lower Danube without delay.<sup>371</sup> In October 1087, the Pecheneg chiefs, who had the defeat inflicted on them by the Kumans fresh in mind, readily accepted the emperor's offer of a truce, but probably avoided a specific commitment in the form of an alliance against the Kumans.<sup>372</sup>

Indeed, the Kumans returned to the northeastern Balkans as they promised. Their host reappeared in the lower Danube region probably in late October or early November 1087.<sup>373</sup> Upon arriving in the area, these nomads sent out spies in all directions, so they soon discovered that the Pecheneg host was no longer lingering in Paradounavon, but that it was encamped in the vicinity of the town of Markellai.<sup>374</sup> However, as the Pechenegs were located on Byzantine soil, and also considering the fact that the Kuman chiefs did not intend to engage in the fight against the Pechenegs without the consent of the emperor,<sup>375</sup> they sent messengers to Alexios Komnenos, asking for permission to cross the border.<sup>376</sup> Alexios

<sup>370</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.2. (p. 218); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 247; Zlatarski, *История*, 196; Spinci, *Migrations*, 144; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 113. There is an interesting mention in the peace treaty with the Pechenegs, stating that the Pechenegs were to retain those territories in Paradounavon they had conquered so far ("μένειν ἐν ᾧ προκατέλαβον τόπω"), which, in my view, certainly did not apply to the surroundings of the town of Markellai, as the territory south of the Haimos was to remain in Byzantine hands, as the treaty stated. I believe that the territory recently conquered by the Pechenegs represents the Byzantine enclaves in Paradounavon (around the town of Preslav and northern Dobrudja). See also Chalandon, *Essai*, 118–119. See also text above.

<sup>371</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.2. (p. 218); Zlatarski, *История*, 196; Malamut, "Image," 139. It is interesting to see how, even in a very disadvantageous strategic situation, the Byzantine emperor tried, holding the "Kuman card," to force the Paradounavon Pechenegs to normalize their mutual relations, or to revert the *status quo* to the period before the Nestor's uprising.

<sup>372</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218); Zlatarski, *История*, 197; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 130.

<sup>373</sup> I arrived at this time data in a similar way to note 362 above. The Kumans were able to travel back and forth from the lower Danube to their settlements in about a month. The hypothetical date at the turn of October and November 1087 also takes into account the fact that if the Kumans arrived later than on the proposed date, they would have had to deal with harsh weather conditions at the beginning of winter.

<sup>374</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218); Zlatarski, *История*, 197.

<sup>375</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218).

<sup>376</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 248; Chalandon, *Essai*, 118; Zlatarski, *История*, 197; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 130.

Komnenos, having in mind the recently concluded truce with the Pardounavon Pechenegs, did not allow the Kumans to enter the Byzantine territory. Instead, through messengers, he tried to appease the Kuman chiefs with generous gifts and make them return to their settlements, which they eventually did.<sup>377</sup> Under such circumstances, it was a great success of Byzantine diplomacy, because the Kumans, despite the fact that the Byzantines did not allow them to attack the Pechenegs, withdrew to their settlements as Byzantine friends and informal allies.<sup>378</sup>

At the beginning of 1088, after all the dramatic upheavals, Alexios Komnenos, along with senior officials at the imperial court in Constantinople, genuinely believed that, despite the heavy military defeat at the battle of Dristra, he had managed to bring the situation back under control.<sup>379</sup> He allowed himself a small portion of cautious optimism not only because of the peace treaty with the Pechenegs, but probably also due to the fact that the former Pecheneg allies, the Kumans, returned to their homes in the Pontic steppe as Pecheneg enemies. However, the declared truce did not last long. The Pechenegs soon violated it and relaunched their marauding raids to Thrace, so that even the Byzantine emissary Synesios, who had only recently contributed to the conclusion of the peace treaty, was forced to return to Constantinople.<sup>380</sup> As a result of the recent defeat and many casualties, the Byzantines did not have enough military forces capable to stop the renewed nomad advance. This explains why around this time the Pechenegs were able to capture (albeit only

<sup>377</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.3. (p. 218); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 248; Chalandon, *Essai*, 119; Zlatarski, *История*, 197; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 130.

<sup>378</sup> There is no mention of the Byzantine-Kuman alliance in the relevant passage of Anna Komnene's text (see note above). However, a brief mention in the speech of Theofylaktos of Ochrid, in which it is clearly stated that Alexios Komnenos concluded an alliance with the Huns against the Skyths, provides a firm foothold for this claim. In this context, the Huns were the Kumans, whereas the Skyths were the Paradounavon Pechenegs. See Gautier, “Théophylacte,” 111: “Ἐκεῖνά σε, ὦ γενναῖε, ἐκεῖνα καὶ τοῖς Οὐννοῖς φοβερόν ἀπειργάσαντο (...) εἰς συμμάχους ἑαυτοῦς κατὰ Σκυθῶν τῶν καταράτων ἐνέγραψαν.” Moreover, in my opinion, it would be difficult to otherwise explain the “coincidental” arrival of the Kumans in Thrace after several years of absence, just before the decisive encounter of the entire war with the Pechenegs (battle of Leboundion) in the spring of 1091. See Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 248; Jonathan Shepard, “‘Father’ or ‘Scorpion’? Style and Substance in Alexius' Diplomacy,” *Alexios I Komnenos—Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989*, 83, note 77. See also text below.

<sup>379</sup> The same kind of cautiously optimistic spirit is reflected in the speech of Theofylaktos of Ochrid of 6 January 1088. See Gautier, “Théophylacte,” 114.

<sup>380</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.4. (p. 219); Chalandon, *Essai*, 119.

temporarily) Philippoupolis, the second largest city in Thrace.<sup>381</sup> According to Anna Komnene's testimony, the news of the fall of this important city into the hands of the nomads deeply saddened the emperor.<sup>382</sup> There were no military reinforcements available to be sent to regain control over the city, so the only possible tactic the Byzantines could follow was to avoid a direct battle with the nomads and, if possible, to harass their smaller plundering groups with unexpected ambushes.<sup>383</sup>

According to some indications, Alexios Komnenos chose not to lead the remaining Byzantine units to Thrace in early spring, but stayed in the imperial palace until April 1088,<sup>384</sup> delegating the full responsibility for conducting the war against the Pechenegs to his generals. We can only assume that the main reason for staying in the capital was to levy soldiers for the newly created units and recruit various mercenaries. One of the possible and preferred sources of mercenaries during this period was undoubtedly the Latin West. In view of the Byzantines, the pope in Rome was its paramount representative. Therefore, good relations with the papal curia conditioned, among other things, the influx of much-needed mercenaries. Because of the support of the pope Gregory VII to Guiscard during his invasion of Byzantium, the contacts between the papacy and Alexios Komnenos were understandably at low ebb in the first years of his reign, as were the numbers of mercenaries coming from the West. However, precisely in the spring of 1088 and for the first time since the reign of Michael VII Doukas,<sup>385</sup> things were about to change. Under the

<sup>381</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.4. (p. 219); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 248; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 131; Paroň, *Pechenegs*, 364. Some historians reject or completely question this brief reference to the domination of the city by the Pechenegs; see Soustal, *Thrakien*, 400.

<sup>382</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.4. (p. 219).

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*; Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 248; Chalandon, *Essai*, 119; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 131; Malamut, "Image," 141; Kólias, "Πολιτική," 257–258.

<sup>384</sup> This premise is based on the birth of the third daughter of the emperor Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina, Eudoxia, on 14 January 1089. See Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 55: "μηνί ιαννουαρίω ιδ' ινδικτιώνος ιβ', ἐγεννήθη ἡ πορφυρογέννητος κυρά Εὐδοξία, ἡμέρα <ά >."

<sup>385</sup> Good relations between the emperor Michael Doukas and the pope Gregory VII were directed against the rise of Robert Guiscard, who in 1071 seized the last Byzantine foothold in southern Italy, the city of Bari, and intended to extend his expansion plans to the other side of the Adriatic Sea. See also Charanis, "Crusade," 22–23. In the early 1080s, however, relations with the papal curia cooled down, and, therefore, the 1081 Norman invasion into the Byzantine territory, as mentioned in detail above, took place with full papal support. In the early years of Alexios Komnenos' reign, the emperor Henry IV, who was an adversary of both the pope and Guiscard, was therefore the main ally of Byzantium in the Latin West.

emperor's personal initiative, there was a gradual cautious restoration of contacts between Constantinople and Rome.<sup>386</sup> This hypothesis is based on a minor note by Anna Komnene, according to which her father, while staying in the imperial palace, awaited mercenary troops from the Latin West (which ultimately did not arrive).<sup>387</sup> The reason for this setback was that the new course of Byzantine diplomacy was untimely at the moment. The pope Urban II (1088–1099), who had been elected only recently, had to seek general recognition of his position as the spiritual head of Western Christianity in the first place and, thus, spent the first years of his pontificate in southern Italy fighting against the defiant antipope Clement III (1080–1100), residing in Rome, which of course made it impossible, practically and theoretically, to send or to inspire military assistance to Byzantium on his part.<sup>388</sup>

However, the dramatic development of the situation in Thrace soon demanded the full attention of Alexios Komnenos, as he had to take over the defense of Kypsella in person by the autumn of 1088 at the latest.<sup>389</sup> Since this town is located far south of the area of hostilities in the previous year (as mentioned above, the Pechenegs were located near the town of Markellai at the turn of 1087/88), it is possible to conclude that, between the spring and autumn of 1088, the Pecheneg raiders managed to penetrate deep into Thracian territory. Because of the enduring military weakness of the Byzantine army, Alexios Komnenos was again forced to resort to

<sup>386</sup> According to the information contained in the Chronicle of Orderic Vitalis, the initiative was taken by the pope Urban II. The chronicler notes that this pope sent messengers to “*the French and Greeks*” with letters asking them for support against his opponent Clement III. See Orderic Vitalis, 166: “*Vrbanus (...) missit legatos et epistolas Romana auctoritatis Francis et Grecis.*” This thawing of mutual relations between the papal curia and Byzantium became more apparent only in September 1089, when Alexios Komnenos pushed through the matter of restoration of the pope's name in the diptychs of the Orthodox Church at a church synod in Constantinople. Holtzmann, “Unionsverhandlungen,” 47–50. The slow progress of negotiations between the pope and the Byzantine emperor can also be partly explained by the fact that Byzantine diplomacy initially sided with the antipope Clement III, who was supported by the main Byzantine ally in the West during the war against the Normans, the Roman-German emperor Henry IV.

<sup>387</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.5. (p. 219): “τὸ ἐπιζόμενον μισθοφορικὸν οὐπω κατέλαβε.” This effort can also be seen as a kind of forerunner of numerous requests for assistance at the beginning of 1091 and later, which Alexios Komnenos addressed to Urban II and which ultimately represented one of the important causes of the genesis of the First Crusade.

<sup>388</sup> Ian S. Robinson, *The Papacy 1073–1189: Continuity and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 374.

<sup>389</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.4. (p. 219); Chalandon, *Essai*, 119; Zlatarski, *История*, 198.

diplomatic negotiations and in the autumn of 1088 addressed the Pechenegs with a new peace initiative.<sup>390</sup> Just as they had a year earlier, the Pecheneg leaders from Paradounavon first accepted Byzantine demands and discontinued their inroads for some time.<sup>391</sup> One of the Pecheneg chiefs named Neantzes even allegedly entered the emperor's service.<sup>392</sup> Alexios Komnenos intended to use the period of ceasefire to recruit new soldiers from among the local population in Thrace.<sup>393</sup> Nevertheless, the Pechenegs thwarted his attempt to increase the numerical strength of his units in this area by resuming their raids. Fortunately for the Byzantines, winter was approaching, so the nomads soon withdrew a little farther north to Taurokomos.<sup>394</sup> As soon as the emperor received news of their withdrawal, he deemed his personal presence in Thrace no longer necessary and left for Constantinople to spend the winter in the imperial palace.

The emperor returned to Thrace again in the spring of 1089 and set up his field command post in Boulgarofygon, north of the Ergene river,<sup>395</sup> which provided a perfect strategic position, as it lay on the road connecting Adrianoupolis and the capital. Thus, it is clear that the emperor's intention was to block the Pecheneg advance toward Constantinople and, if possible, to continue in the skirmishing tactics of disruptive ambushes against smaller groups of marauding nomads. The common denominator

<sup>390</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.5. (p. 219); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 248; Chalandon, *Essai*, 119; Malamut, "Image," 141. This second peace treaty with the Pechenegs is not specifically dated in the text of Anna Komnene either. A clue is the dating of the first peace treaty with 6 January 1088 as *terminus ante quem*, because this treaty is mentioned in the speech of Theofylaktos of Ochrid. See Gautier, "Théophylacte," 98, 113. Therefore, all the events mentioned in the text of the *Alexiad* following the conclusion of this treaty, including the capture of Philippoupolis by the Pechenegs, had to take place in the spring of 1088. Since the reference to the second peace treaty predates the arrival of the winter of 1088, it can be assumed that the second round of peace talks took place in autumn 1088, because the Pechenegs managed to break their part of the new (second) agreement by the wintertime. See *Alexias*, VII.6.2ff (p. 218–220).

<sup>391</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.5. (p. 219).

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.* For more details on this Pecheneg leader, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 217–218; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 210.

<sup>393</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.6. (p. 220).

<sup>394</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.6. (p. 220); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 250; Chalandon, *Essai*, 124; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 131; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 364. The exact location of the town (or mountain ridge with numerous peasant settlements) of Taurokomos is unknown, but it was apparently located southeast of Adrianoupolis. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 472; Zlatarski, *История*, 198. See also text below.

<sup>395</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.1. (p. 220); Chalandon, *Essai*, 125; Zlatarski, *История*, 198.



of these actions was to get as much time as possible to restore the battle-worthiness of the Byzantine army.<sup>396</sup> The winter fighting break started to bear fruit in this regard, as Alexios Komnenos came to Thrace with a new cavalry unit, consisting of about 2000 men known as the *Archontopouloi*. Members of this *tagma* were recruited from among the sons of soldiers killed in previous battles, who were personally selected and trained by the emperor.<sup>397</sup> Besides the *Archontopouloi*, there were also other units such as the *tagma* of Norman mercenaries under Tatikios' command and the emperor's personal guard.<sup>398</sup>

In the early spring of 1089, the Pechenegs also resumed their military activities. Thanks to their great numerical superiority, the nomads also had the overall strategic initiative and the less numerous Byzantine units could only react to their movements. For instance, with the arrival of pleasant spring weather, the main bulk of the Pecheneg host left Taurokomos, but did not advance toward Boulgarofygon, as originally assumed by Alexios Komnenos, but moved southward to the town of Charioupolis.<sup>399</sup> Once the Pechenegs set up their camp there, they instantly began to ravage the surrounding area. Since Alexios Komnenos did not like the idea of the Pechenegs plundering the vicinity of Charioupolis and, at the same time, wanted to give his new cavalry unit the opportunity of baptism by fire under real combat conditions, he devised a plan for a surprise attack on the Pecheneg camp at a moment when the main bulk of the nomadic host would be busy pillaging the surroundings and only guards would remain in the camp.<sup>400</sup> Yet, the emperor's plan was essentially doomed from the very beginning, as the Pechenegs, masters in ambushes and surprise attacks, vigilantly monitored the movement of the Byzantine army from

<sup>396</sup>The negative effect of this strategy was that the Pechenegs had unlimited freedom of movement throughout Thrace.

<sup>397</sup>*Alexias*, VII.7.1. (p. 220); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 250; Chalandon, *Essai*, 125; Zlatarski, *История*, 198; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 131; Haldon, *Warfare*, 93; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 364.

<sup>398</sup>*Alexias*, VII.7.3. (p. 221). The emperor's personal guard probably consisted, as during the battle of Dristra in 1087, of Alexios Komnenos' close relatives and servants of the imperial household. Haldon, *Warfare*, 93.

<sup>399</sup>*Alexias*, VII.7.1. (p. 220); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 250; Chalandon, *Essai*, 125; Zlatarski, *История*, 198; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 131.

<sup>400</sup>The basic scheme of this battle plan is very similar to the tactics used by Alexios Komnenos against the Normans at Larissa in 1083. When one part of the Byzantine army (the "bait") lured the main Norman forces out of their camp, the emperor attacked it with the rest of his forces and practically wiped out its few defenders. See text above.

nearby hills and only waited for the appropriate moment to attack.<sup>401</sup> So when the unsuspecting and combat-inexperienced unit of the *Archontopouloi* charged against the Pecheneg camp, the nomads unexpectedly struck from behind into their rear.<sup>402</sup> A classic demonstration of the nomadic steppe warfare cost the Byzantines dearly, as about 300 men fell on the battlefield that day.<sup>403</sup>

The Pechenegs then moved through the valley upstream of the left Ergene tributary known today as the Anaçag. When it became clear that their target would be the town of Aspros (or Apros) located about 45 kilometers southwest of Charioupolis,<sup>404</sup> Byzantine troops rushed to garrison the endangered city before the nomads got there. Thanks to superior knowledge of the local terrain, the Byzantine soldiers managed to beat the nomads, so when the first Pecheneg groups appeared near the town, they had already been guarding its walls.<sup>405</sup> Unaware of the presence of Byzantine troops in Aspros, the Pechenegs set up their camp not far from the town. The nomads felt secure as they assumed that the defeated Byzantines had already completely withdrawn from the area. The next day at sunrise, they left the camp and scattered around, looking for fodder for their horses.<sup>406</sup> At that point, the Byzantines saw the opportunity to avenge the previous defeat and Alexios Komnenos grasped it immediately. This time, he sent the *tagma* of the Norman knights commanded by Tatikios to engage the enemy. Experienced Normans surprised the nomads and within a short period of time slayed 300 Pecheneg warriors and captured many others.<sup>407</sup>

At this point, it should be noted that although these encounters (or rather skirmishes) are described by Anna Komnene in vivid detail and presented as important achievements, they could not have had any real impact on the Pecheneg host as a whole, as, despite the continuous efforts of

<sup>401</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.2 (p. 220–221).

<sup>402</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.2 (p. 221).

<sup>403</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.2 (p. 221); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 250–251; Zlatarski, *История*, 198–199; Diaconu, *Petchênègues*, 131; Malamut, "Image," 141; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 364.

<sup>404</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.3. (p. 221); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 251; Chalandon, *Essai*, 125; Zlatarski, *История*, 199.

<sup>405</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.3. (p. 221); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 251; Chalandon, *Essai*, 125; Diaconu, *Petchênègues*, 131.

<sup>406</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.3. (p. 221).

<sup>407</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.3. (p. 221); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 251; Zlatarski, *История*, 199; Diaconu, *Petchênègues*, 131.

Byzantine commanders, it moved around Thrace freely without any restrictions.<sup>408</sup> To achieve more long-lasting success, Alexios Komnenos needed better trained and more effective and experienced soldiers. Due to the Pecheneg presence in Thrace in 1089, it was not possible to levy new soldiers from among the local population. Once again, recruitment of mercenaries from abroad, mainly from the Latin West, seemed to be the only viable option. Therefore, when, in late 1089 or early 1090,<sup>409</sup> the Flemish count Robert I the Frisian (1071–1093) was on his way back from pilgrimage to Palestine, the Byzantine emperor did not hesitate and promptly asked him for the provision of a knight unit to serve in the Byzantine army. The Flemish count eventually agreed to the emperor's requests.<sup>410</sup> As a result, by summer or early autumn of 1090,<sup>411</sup> the Byzantine military forces were strengthened by the arrival of 500 Flemish knights, bringing with them their own offensive and defensive equipment, as well as 150 fully trained spare war horses.<sup>412</sup> The influx of such experienced and battle-hardened cavalry units was very welcome for the Byzantines, as since 1086 the Byzantine army had faced not only a shortage of experienced soldiers, but also of suitable mounts due to increased casualties.<sup>413</sup> Simultaneously, besides the Pechenegs in Thrace, the Byzantine empire was also endangered by the activities of the Seljuk Turks in the East. Therefore, Alexios Komnenos decided that this precious mercenary unit would not stay in Thrace, but would be temporarily transferred to the city of Nikomedia in Asia Minor, where it was to protect the adjacent area against the Seljuk raids organized by Abu'l-Kasim, the powerful and crafty emir of Nikaia.<sup>414</sup>

The following war year of 1090 was also marked by the increased intensity of military clashes between the Pechenegs and the Byzantines in Thrace. Yet, strangely enough, Anna Komnene does not cover the whole

<sup>408</sup> Birkenmeier, *Army*, 75.

<sup>409</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.1. (p. 218). For the dating of the meeting of Alexios Komnenos and the Flemish count to the end of 1089, or the beginning of 1090, but not to the autumn of 1087, see text above.

<sup>410</sup> *Alexias*, VII.6.1. (p. 218). See Ganshof, "Robert," 58–64.

<sup>411</sup> For the dating of the arrival of the Flemish knights, see text above.

<sup>412</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.4. (p. 221–222); Ganshof, "Robert," 71–72; Vasil'evskij, "Печенегы," 251; Zlatarski, *История*, 199; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 131; Shepard, "Substance," 103.

<sup>413</sup> Ganshof, "Robert," 72; Krijnie Ciggaar, "Flemish Mercenaries in Byzantium: Later History in an Old Norse Miracle," *Byzantion* 51 (1981): 45, note 6.

<sup>414</sup> *Alexias*, VII.7.4. (p. 222); Janin, "Frans," 69; Ganshof, "Robert," 73; Belke, "Bemerkungen," 73–74; Bondoux, *Bithynie*, 401; Frankopan, *Crusade*, 57.

year, but starts her account only in mid-autumn 1090.<sup>415</sup> A possible explanation for this is the fact that only at this point did Alexios Komnenos take over the supreme command of all units defending Thrace. Therefore, operations throughout the year were probably taking place in his personal absence, and hence were not of particular interest to the Byzantine princess. The reason for the emperor's sudden involvement was the new deep penetration of the enemy host into the Thracian hinterland. The Pechenegs resumed their move south and reappeared in the area of the lower Maritsa. This time they set up a camp near the town of Polyboton<sup>416</sup> from where they started pillaging the surroundings of the nearby town of Rousion.<sup>417</sup> After receiving this news, Alexios Komnenos, at the time staying in the imperial palace in Constantinople,<sup>418</sup> decided to take immediate action. Since he apparently could not afford to wait for the entire Byzantine army to gather, he set off toward Polyboton at the head of a small vanguard. Upon arriving in the area, Byzantine scouts spotted a group of the Pechenegs engaged in plundering.<sup>419</sup> At that point, Alexios Komnenos gave the order to charge because he believed the nomads, caught off guard, would become an easy prey.<sup>420</sup> However, the Byzantines yet again seem to have fallen victim to the faultless nomad tactics of feigned retreat and ambushes. Without adding any further details, Anna Komnene laconically notes that the Byzantine troops were badly mauled by the nomads, and Alexios Komnenos with other survivors had to seek refuge within the walls of Rousion.<sup>421</sup> Fortunately for the Byzantines, other units belonging

<sup>415</sup> For this date, see above.

<sup>416</sup> The exact location of Polyboton is unknown. Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 599. However, it probably lay north of the Rousion-Kypsella line. Anna Komnene's text also clearly suggests that the town was located nearby, perhaps 8 to 10 km west of the town of Rousion, and that a small river flowed between the two towns. A hilly area rolled to the north of the town. *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 229). See also Zlatarski, *История*, 200, note 2 in Chap. 1.

<sup>417</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 227); Zlatarski, *История*, 200. Rousion can be identified with the abandoned town of Rusköy, located 6 km southeast of Keşan in Turkish Thrace. Asdracha, "Thrace," 236; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 620–622.

<sup>418</sup> During the first half of 1090, Alexios Komnenos, while in Constantinople, was busy organizing the operations aimed against Çaka, the Turkish emir of Smyrna, mentioned in the *Alexiad* before these events. *Alexias*, VII.8.1. ff (p. 222–226). Perhaps this is the main reason behind his apparent impatience to return to Constantinople and deal with Çaka as soon as possible.

<sup>419</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 227).

<sup>420</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 227).

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*

to the main body and the rearguard of the Byzantine army emerged on the scene, among which the *tagma* of the Normans (known to the Byzantines as the *Maniakatoi Latinoi*), as well as the members of the imperial household, are explicitly mentioned.<sup>422</sup>

There is an interesting fact that can be inferred from the names of military commanders and individuals mentioned by the Byzantine princess in connection with the described military skirmishes in the autumn of 1090. Since Georgios Pyrrhos,<sup>423</sup> Neantzes,<sup>424</sup> Kantzous,<sup>425</sup> Tatrane, <sup>426</sup> Ouzas,<sup>427</sup> Michael(?) Monastras,<sup>428</sup> and Nikolaos(?) Synesios<sup>429</sup> were either of nomadic origin (the Uzes, the Pechenegs, and even possibly the Kumans) or were known for their expertise in nomadic warfare and archery, we can assume that during this period of reorganization of the Byzantine army, the newly formed units, such as the *Archontopouloi*, adopted (if not directly copied) the nomad tactics of fighting. Their main asset consisted, as in the case of the Pechenegs, in the deployment of light cavalry and mounted archers, which signifies a new trend in the Byzantine army, which had already been applied in the spring of 1083 before a series of crucial clashes with the Normans near Larissa.<sup>430</sup>

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., VII.9.2. (p. 227). See note 232 in Chap. 4.

<sup>423</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.4. (p. 231). Georgios Pyrrhos took part in the 1083 battle against the Normans at Larissa, in which he excelled as an expert archer. See note 523 in Chap. 4.

<sup>424</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 227). This Pecheneg joined the service of the Byzantine emperor in 1088 after the second peace treaty with the Paradounavon Pechenegs. See text above.

<sup>425</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 227); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 159; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 149.

<sup>426</sup> Tatrane/Katrane or Tatrane was, like Neantzes, of Pecheneg origin, and defected to the service of the Byzantine emperor. *Alexias*, VII.9.1. (p. 227); Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 292–293; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 302; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 229.

<sup>427</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.7. (p. 229).

<sup>428</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.7. (p. 229). Anna Komnene does not give any further details about Monastras' origin, but scholars assume that he was of unspecified Turkish, most probably Kuman, origin. See Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 192; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 213–216. Recently, the seals of an individual named Michael Monastras and a rather modest court rank of *prōtobestiarios* or *prōtobestēs* have been uncovered in the town of Shumen in northwestern Bulgaria. Although it would be very tempting to identify this individual with Monastras, who had certainly been baptized before entering the imperial service (perhaps during the reign of Michael VII), this possibility remains unresolved. Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 271.

<sup>429</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.7. (p. 229). It needs to be remembered that Synesios, as the Byzantine envoy, lived with the Pechenegs in Paradounavon for some time and thus probably had the opportunity to become familiar with their everyday life and customs.

<sup>430</sup> See text above. See also Meško, “Nomad Influences,” 70.

The following morning, the Byzantines arranged in a battle formation and prepared to fight.<sup>431</sup> The nomads apparently approached as close as possible to a place the local peasants ominously called Hades.<sup>432</sup> Alexios was aware of their deployment nearby, and therefore, instead of the usual signaling of a field attack, Byzantine soldiers were to take positions in absolute silence so as not to lose the element of surprise and give away their position to the unsuspecting nomads.<sup>433</sup> But shortly before the battle, Neantzes managed to defect to his tribesmen<sup>434</sup> and immediately alerted the Pecheneg leaders to an imminent Byzantine attack, informing them of the main features of the Byzantine battle plan. Anna Komnene claims that it was with the help of this information that the nomads were able to win the subsequent engagement. After fierce fighting, the Byzantines were routed and started to flee from the battlefield.<sup>435</sup> Alexios Komnenos and some armed members of his personal guard managed not only to retreat, but also to collect and regroup most of the Byzantine soldiers scattered in the surrounding area, so when the Pechenegs approached the river flowing before Rousion, they found the Byzantine army facing them in the combat formation anew.<sup>436</sup> Following the example of tactics taken from the Pechenegs, the sides of this formation were probably protected by a makeshift wall of wagons and carts brought here by peasants from nearby Rousion.<sup>437</sup> Naturally, the Pechenegs did not expect such a turn of events and their determination to fight started to dwindle.<sup>438</sup> At dusk, both armies retreated to the safety of their camps.<sup>439</sup> Those Byzantine soldiers who had been dispersed around the area after skirmishes in the morning were returning to the Byzantine camp individually or in groups.<sup>440</sup> At the same time, it is possible that new reinforcements commanded by

<sup>431</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.2. (p. 227).

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.* The location of this place is unknown, but it had to lie somewhere between the towns of Rousion and Polyboton, somewhat closer to Rousion, separated by a river. See *Alexias*, VII.10.4. (p. 231); Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 387.

<sup>433</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.2. (p. 227).

<sup>434</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.5. (p. 228).

<sup>435</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.6. (p. 227).

<sup>436</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.6. (pp. 227–228).

<sup>437</sup> See Malamut, “Image,” 141.

<sup>438</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.7. (p. 229).

<sup>439</sup> That is, the Byzantines to the town of Rousion and the Pechenegs to the location known as Hades. *Alexias*, VII.9.2. (p. 227).

<sup>440</sup> *Alexias*, VII.9.6. (p. 229).

Ouzas, Monastras, and Synesios—most probably the Uzes in the Byzantine service (*ethnikoi*)—also arrived at the camp.<sup>441</sup>

On the third day, the Pechenegs came close to the town of Rousion again with the intention of attacking the Byzantines. Alexios Komnenos was prepared for this possibility thanks to Tatrane's advice and warnings<sup>442</sup> and at dawn sent the Uzes under the command of Ouzas and Monastras from the camp to bypass the nomad host and wait for the right moment when the Pechenegs would be busy fighting the remaining Byzantine forces. At that moment, they were supposed to attack the Pecheneg camp and steal or scatter all the horses and cattle present there.<sup>443</sup> Having given these orders, Alexios Komnenos led the rest of the Byzantine troops out of the camp and set them up in the battle formation, once again taking a place in the center as the supreme commander.<sup>444</sup> The obviously defensive nature of the Byzantine combat arrangement is corroborated by the fact that Alexios Komnenos ordered the mounted archers to dismount their horses and take a position in front of the main Byzantine battle line. This would enable them to release dense and accurate volleys of arrows, which were supposed to halt, or at least disrupt, the coherence of the Pecheneg charge.<sup>445</sup> The emperor's plan was eventually a success, as the Pechenegs, stunned by the unusual fierceness and intensity of Byzantine archery fire, were unable to withstand it and decided to disengage.<sup>446</sup> At this moment, the Byzantines began to pursue the fleeing nomads, causing them further heavy losses.<sup>447</sup> Many of them died in panic in a mass attempt to cross the river (apparently today's Muzali river), flowing between the battlefield and their encampment where they were seeking refuge.<sup>448</sup>

<sup>441</sup> This assumption is based on the presence of Ouzas on the battlefield. During the battle of Dristra in 1087, he was the second-in-command of this unit, which at that time was under the command of *meġas hetaireiarġhos* Arġyros Karadja, and it is possible that in the autumn of 1090 he was acting as its leader again, either as the deputy of the absent Karadja or as its new commander.

<sup>442</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.1. (pp. 229–230).

<sup>443</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.2. (p. 230). In this case, it is again a very similar tactic of indirect charge to that used by Alexios Komnenos against Bohemund's Normans in the battle of Larissa. See text above.

<sup>444</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.3. (p. 231).

<sup>445</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.3. (p. 231).

<sup>446</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.4. (p. 231).

<sup>447</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.4. (p. 231).

<sup>448</sup> *Alexias*, VII.10.3. (p. 231).

As noted above, even this most recent Byzantine “triumph” did not represent a serious blow to the much larger Pecheneg host scattered all over Thrace. After three days of rest in Rousion, Alexios Komnenos ordered his entire military force to retreat east to the town of Tzouroulon.<sup>449</sup> The reason for this new move is easy to understand. Due to its strategic location on the main route *Via Militaris* in the central part of the Thracian peninsula<sup>450</sup> and its strong defensive walls,<sup>451</sup> Tzouroulon was far more suitable for defending and blocking the access road to the Byzantine capital than Rousion situated farther west. However, since it was not possible to accommodate all the troops inside the walls of Tzouroulon, the emperor ordered the soldiers to fence the space on the east side of the town with a wooden palisade.<sup>452</sup> Soon afterward, the Pechenegs appeared in the area. They also crossed the Xerogypsos river<sup>453</sup> and set up a large camp between the watercourse and the town.<sup>454</sup>

In accordance with their traditional forms of warfare, the Pechenegs did not intend to mount a full-scale siege of the Byzantine troops hiding behind the walls of Tzouroulon. They seem to have just been waiting for the emperor’s next move and, at the same time, trying to starve out this populous Thracian town. The nomads probably deemed this task to be an easy one, as, in addition to the ordinary town population, there were also Byzantine troops and many local peasants from surrounding areas in the town.<sup>455</sup> Alexios Komnenos was once again very clearly aware that his forces could not measure up to those of the Pechenegs in a direct battle,<sup>456</sup>

<sup>449</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.1. (p. 232); Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Zlatarski, *История*, 200.

<sup>450</sup> Malamut, “Image,” 141. Tzouroulon is today’s Turkish city of Çorlu. Asdracha, “Thrace,” 255; Pralong, “Fortifications,” 181, 186; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 684–688.

<sup>451</sup> Shepard, “Disinformation,” 257. Parts of the walls on the western side of the town have been preserved to this day and in some places reach as high as four meters. The construction technique is typically Byzantine and is characterized by alternating use of layers of worked blocks of stone and fired bricks. As for the dating of the fortification, it is possible that its origins still fall into the Roman period. See Pralong, “Fortifications,” 185; Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 687.

<sup>452</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.1. (p. 232).

<sup>453</sup> Today’s Çorlu Suyu river, left tributary of the Ergene river. Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 691.

<sup>454</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.1. (p. 232).

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.* The Pechenegs and other nomadic peoples rarely besieged fortified towns. Pletneva, “Печенеги,” 198.

<sup>456</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.2. (p. 232); Zlatarski, *История*, 200.



and therefore sought to defeat the nomads with a ruse aimed at reducing their crushing numerical superiority, while minimizing Byzantine losses.<sup>457</sup> Finally, he came up with an ingenious plan. At night, under the cover of darkness, the inhabitants of the town were ordered to hang from the walls above the steepest slope always two and two wagon wheels connected by an axis.<sup>458</sup> The next morning, the emperor personally led a sally with a detachment of Byzantine infantry against the Pechenegs in their encampment in order to lure them under the section of the walls where the wheels had been secretly prepared and positioned.<sup>459</sup> When the Pechenegs swallowed the bait and attacked, the Byzantine formation in front of the city walls suddenly started to split into two, with one half moving to the right and the other to the left.<sup>460</sup> At that moment, soldiers on the walls cut the ropes on which the wheels were hanging, and through the created corridor between the two formations of infantrymen the wheels rushed directly at the surprised Pechenegs, breaking and crushing the bones of both the riders and their mounts.<sup>461</sup> The ensuing confusion among the Pechenegs was then used by the Byzantines for a full frontal attack. The nomads could no longer withstand the onslaught and started to flee; many of them panicked and drowned in the Xerogypsos river during the chaotic retreat.<sup>462</sup>

Although the Byzantine battle trick was successful, the Pecheneg numerical superiority was still undisputed, as evidenced by the fact that they were ready to meet the Byzantines in battle again the next day, as if nothing had happened.<sup>463</sup> Under such circumstances, even the emperor

<sup>457</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.2. (p. 232).

<sup>458</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.2. (p. 232); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Zlatarski, *История*, 200; Shepard, "Disinformation," 257.

<sup>459</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.3. (p. 233).

<sup>460</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.3. (p. 233).

<sup>461</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.4. (pp. 233–234); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Shepard, "Disinformation," 257; Zlatarski, *История*, 200.

<sup>462</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.4. (p. 234). Interestingly enough, a similar trick (albeit unsuccessful) was used by the Goths in 540 against the Byzantine army led by Belisarios, which besieged the Goth fortress of Auximon located on a high hill. Identical tactics (with no success, however) against the Makedonian phalanx of Alexander the Great were used in 335 BC by the Thracians. See Alexopoulos, "Handbooks," 57–58.

<sup>463</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.5. (p. 234).

did not want to stay idle<sup>464</sup> and, at dawn the following day, ordered the Byzantine army to march out of Tzouroulon and arrange in a battle formation with himself in the center.<sup>465</sup> In the end, the battle began in earnest. After fierce fighting on both sides, the more disciplined Byzantine troops started to get the upper hand and the Pechenegs again tried to rescue themselves by fleeing from the battleground.<sup>466</sup> In the pursuit of the routed nomads, the cautious emperor constantly bore in mind that the Pechenegs could surprise and ambush his soldiers if they pursued the nomads too far. Therefore, he ordered them not to wander farther from the battlefield than necessary.<sup>467</sup> Again, it should be noted that although the Byzantine army prevailed in the end, their victory did not mean the complete destruction of their enemies.<sup>468</sup> The maximum outcome of this series of skirmishes was the fact that the Byzantines were able to block Pecheneg progress to the Byzantine capital for a while, but even this Byzantine success was not permanent because after each battle the nomads only regrouped. For instance, after suffering two defeats near Tzouroulon, the Pecheneg host retreated to the area between the towns of Boulgarofygon and Little Nikaia,<sup>469</sup> but it was clear that it would return closer to the Byzantine capital sometime in the future. As winter approached, Alexios Komnenos decided to return to Constantinople and left the responsibility for monitoring Pecheneg movements and commanding Byzantine troops in the area in the capable hands of generals Nikolaos Maurokatakalon and Basileios Kourtikios.<sup>470</sup>

<sup>464</sup> It is very likely that his decision-making was influenced by the fact that Tzouroulon now housed the town residents, as well as peasants from the surrounding area seeking refuge from the Pechenegs and the entire Byzantine army, and, in the event of a prolonged siege, there was a possibility that they would soon run out of food and water supplies and that epidemic diseases would eventually break out. Shepard, "Disinformation," 257.

<sup>465</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.5. (p. 234).

<sup>466</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.5. (p. 234); Zlatarski, *История*, 200.

<sup>467</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.5. (p. 234); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 75.

<sup>468</sup> Birkenmeier, *Army*, 75; Diaconu, *Petchénègues*, 132.

<sup>469</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.6. (p. 235); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Zlatarski, *История*, 200; Malamut, "Image," 141; Рагоń, *Pechenegs*, 365. The area where the Pechenegs retreated lay about 80 km northwest of Tzouroulon at the foot of the Yıldız dağları heights.

<sup>470</sup> *Alexias*, VII.11.6. (p. 235).

However, the hostilities were interrupted for a short time only. Already on 13 February 1091,<sup>471</sup> the news of the Pecheneg new advancement reached the Byzantine capital, as the nomads were apparently not stopped even by the cold weather. This time, the aim of their march was a location in close proximity to Constantinople—the town of Choïrobakchoi.<sup>472</sup> Alexios Komnenos decided to set out there immediately and strengthen its defense. Since it was necessary to act quickly, there was no time for a lengthy gathering of forces. Therefore, he assembled only a small military detachment of 500 men from among the city guard (*Bigla?*) and fresh recruits.<sup>473</sup> Simultaneously, on the same evening, the emperor sent messengers to his relatives and army commanders to gather their military escorts by the next Monday, that is, by the beginning of the Cheese Week.<sup>474</sup> The next morning, Friday, 14 February 1091,<sup>475</sup> the emperor set off with his hastily assembled force (*de facto* a vanguard) and by sunset entered Choïrobakchoi, where he immediately took various defensive measures to protect the town against a possible sudden enemy attack.<sup>476</sup>

<sup>471</sup>This date is based on the assumption that Alexios Komnenos left with his troops for the town of Choïrobakchoi the very next morning. See text below.

<sup>472</sup>*Alexias*, VIII.1.1. (p. 236); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 238; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Zlatarski, *История*, 201; Gautier, “Diatribes,” 9. Choïrobakchoi was situated about 20 km west of Constantinople on the plain near the present-day towns of Büyüçekmece (in the Byzantine area known as Athyra) and Küçükçekmece (known as Rhegion). As two waterways ran through this plain (the Athyras and the Mollas rivers), and the Via *Egnatia* also passed through this area, it was a very convenient and strategically important place for the gathering of the Byzantine troops (infantry and cavalry alike). Jean-Claude Cheynet, “Episkeptitai et autres gestionnaires des biens publics (d’après les sceaux de l’IFEB),” *SBS* 7 (2002): 101–102. This fact also explains the increased Pecheneg interest in this location (an excellent site for winter encampment), as well as the immediate reaction of Alexios Komnenos. Currently, the southern part of this plain is located below the water surface of the Büyüçekmece gölü reservoir. Most recently, this location has been definitely confirmed by Külzer, who puts the town of Choïrobakchoi to a place between the aforementioned rivers near the present-day site of Bahşayıs. See Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 313.

<sup>473</sup>*Alexias*, VIII.1.1. (p. 236): “ἐπὶ τῆς φρουρᾶς τῆς πόλεως τεταγμένους.” Thanks to this formulation, it could be assumed that *Bigla* was still a separate and functional army unit in the spring of 1091.

<sup>474</sup>*Alexias*, VIII.1.1. (p. 236).

<sup>475</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup>*Alexias*, VIII.1.2. (p. 236–237); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 238; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Zlatarski, *История*, 201.

On Saturday morning, the large host of Pecheneg raiders appeared near the town.<sup>477</sup> Part of them, about 1000 horsemen,<sup>478</sup> continued toward Constantinople, and finally reached Dekaton, which was already within sight of the Byzantine capital.<sup>479</sup> While this larger group embarked on plundering the surrounding area, a much smaller part of the nomad host encamped near the town of Choirobakchoi and intended to wait until the larger group returned.<sup>480</sup> The emperor monitored all their movements from the town walls and concluded that the Pechenegs setting up a camp near the town had no idea that there was a fairly populous Byzantine garrison in Choirobakchoi, which could pose a threat to them.<sup>481</sup> His assumption was confirmed during lunchtime, when many Pechenegs took off their armor, put down their gear and weapons, and started preparing food or rested.<sup>482</sup> Alexios Komnenos summoned his soldiers as he deemed it a

<sup>477</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.3. (p. 237); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Zlatarski, *История*, 201.

<sup>478</sup> Anna Komnene reports 6000 Pecheneg horse archers moving toward Dekaton in total. *Alexias*, VIII.1.3. (p. 237). Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Zlatarski, *История*, 201. In that case, however, the ratio of forces between the Byzantines and this Pecheneg unit would be a staggering 12:1. The second group was probably much smaller and it is possible that it roughly matched the number of the Byzantines. The reasons why I assume the numerical strength of "only" 1000 fighters for the bigger Pecheneg unit are as follows: in the afternoon clash, when this larger group was returning to Choirobakchoi, only a part of the Byzantine force pretending to be the Pechenegs (wearing the clothes of the dead nomads from the first clash) was sufficient to inflict defeat upon them. The Byzantine force could not be large because of the limited number of stolen nomadic clothing and mounts available on the spot. *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238). It is possible to assume that there were no more than 500 of them (the total number of Byzantine soldiers) because even a few days later on their way back to Constantinople, when Alexios Komnenos, as part of a "Canadian prank," used soldiers dressed as the Pechenegs to scare off the other Byzantine troops on their way from the Byzantine capital to join him, not all soldiers were wearing Pecheneg garments or brandishing Pecheneg standards—only the Byzantine soldiers in the vanguard. *Alexias*, VIII.2.2. (p. 239). Therefore, it can be assumed that the entire Pecheneg host moving to the town of Choirobakchoi (before splitting into two) could not have exceeded 1500 or 2000 men, so they outnumbered the Byzantine forces under the emperor's command "only" by a ratio of 3:1 to 4:1.

<sup>479</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.3. (p. 237); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Zlatarski, *История*, 201. The name Dekaton is derived from its location 10 Roman miles, that is, 14.8 km (1 Roman mile = 1480 m), from Constantinople. See Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 325. Anna Komnene uses the ancient unit of length of *stadion* in her archaic style, as it had not been used since the time of the Roman Empire. See Schilbach, *Metrologie*, 32–33.

<sup>480</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.3. (p. 237); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Zlatarski, *История*, 201.

<sup>481</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.3. (p. 237); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253.

<sup>482</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.3. (p. 237); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 253; Zlatarski, *История*, 201.

propitious moment for a surprise attack, but the inexperienced soldiers were still hesitant when seeing the obvious numerical superiority on the enemy's side.<sup>483</sup> In the end, however, they yielded to the emperor's will and, as Anna Komnene notes, carried away by his personal example, they finally attacked. The stunned nomads, feeling completely safe only a few seconds earlier, were in no position to put up any token of resistance, and many of them were killed on the spot or fell into captivity.<sup>484</sup>

Later in the afternoon, the Byzantines gathered on the riverbank,<sup>485</sup> so that the emperor could proceed in enforcing the next step of his plan, in which, once again, the element of surprise was of paramount importance. Alexios Komnenos ordered some of his soldiers to put on the clothes of slain Pechenegs and mount their horses to look like nomads from afar.<sup>486</sup> Soon, those Pechenegs who in the morning had ravaged the nearby surroundings of Constantinople, were on their way back to the camp. As the disguised Byzantine soldiers resembled their own fellow tribesmen, the Pechenegs light-heartedly forded the river and approached their position. At that point, their presumed fellowmen attacked them and this second engagement ended with a similar result to the first one. A vast number of bewildered nomads fell and the rest were taken prisoner.<sup>487</sup> After these lightning successes, the triumphant emperor was able to return to the capital after just two days of military operations, which greatly surprised the residents of Constantinople, who wondered and rejoiced at the unexpected speed and happy ending of the impromptu military expedition.<sup>488</sup>

<sup>483</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238).

<sup>484</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 254; Zlatarski, *История*, 201.

<sup>485</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238). It is today's river Karas (aforementioned river Melas). See Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 254; Zlatarski, *История*, 202. In other sources, this river is known by the name Mauropotamos. Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 518. All these names always mean dark/black river/water.

<sup>486</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 254; Zlatarski, *История*, 201. At the same time, this event demonstrates how much the Byzantine soldiers at the time had to resemble the Pechenegs in terms of external appearance and how powerful the influence of the nomadic style of warfare was at the time on the Byzantine military tradition. as the Byzantines had practically the same weaponry and equipment, it was enough to change only the garments and mounts (or the horse harnesses) to look alike. See also Meško, "Nomad influences," 70.

<sup>487</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.1.5. (p. 238); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 254–255; Zlatarski, *История*, 202.

<sup>488</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.2.5. (p. 240); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 255; Chalandon, *Essai*, 128; Zlatarski, *История*, 202.

As reiterated, even this line of swift victories of Alexios Komnenos could not reverse the overall military standing of Byzantium, which continued to deteriorate at the beginning of 1091 and was soon to worsen.<sup>489</sup> Although in minor skirmishes small Byzantine troops were able to occasionally inflict higher losses on the advancing Pechenegs than their own casualties, or at least block them or force them to retreat for the time being,<sup>490</sup> they were in no position to achieve a decisive victory over the nomads or prevent them from plundering the Thracian hinterland of the Byzantine capital. Conversely, the Pechenegs were still able to control larger areas in Thrace<sup>491</sup> and groups of nomads began to appear more and more frequently in sight of the walls of Constantinople. Just three weeks after Alexios Komnenos' swift victory, the presence of nomads near the Byzantine capital was so indisputable that on Sunday after St Theodore's holiday (8 March 1091)<sup>492</sup> the Constantinopolitans were even afraid to visit this saint's temple in Bathys Ryaks<sup>493</sup> located just outside the city walls.<sup>494</sup> In the words of an eyewitness, the patriarch of Antioch John VI the Oxite (1089–1100), in those days, it seemed as if the once mighty Roman Empire had diminished and shrunk to such an extent that its borders passed through the Golden Gate in the west and the acropolis of old Byzantium in the east.<sup>495</sup> Moreover, the long war

<sup>489</sup> Compare with a critical remark allegedly uttered by *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos in the aftermath of Alexios Komnenos' victory at Chirobakchoi: "This victory was a profitless joy to us, to them a harmless pain." *Alexias*, VIII.3.1. (p. 241): "ἡ νίκη αὐτῆ χαρὰ μὲν ἀκερδῆς, λύπη δὲ ἀζήμιος."

<sup>490</sup> Anna Komnene's description gives a similar impression. However, two speeches by the patriarch of Antioch John VI the Oxite may evoke a slightly different perception of the military standing of the Byzantine Empire in the spring of 1091. The patriarch claims that Alexios Komnenos had gradually lost his entire army in the battles against the Pechenegs. Gautier, "Diatribes," 35. For the person and career of John the Oxite, see Grumel, "Patriarches," 294. Most recently, Ryder commented on the role of both his speeches in the context of imperial court politics. See Judith R. Ryder, "The Role of the Speeches of John the Oxite in Komnenian Court Politics," *Reading in the Byzantine Empire*, ed. by Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 93–115.

<sup>491</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.1. (p. 241); Gautier, "Diatribes," 35; Spinei, *Migrations*, 144.

<sup>492</sup> The feast of St Theodore Teron is celebrated in the Orthodox Church on the first Saturday of the Great Lent, which in 1091 fell on 7 March. *Alexias*, VIII.3.1. (p. 241); Chalandon, *Essai*, 129. Vasil'evskij gives an erroneous date of 2 March 1091. See Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 255.

<sup>493</sup> Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 282–283.

<sup>494</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.1. (p. 241); Chalandon, *Essai*, 129; Gautier, "Diatribes," 10.

<sup>495</sup> Gautier, "Diatribes," 35.

with the Pechenegs probably started to affect the inhabitants of Constantinople financially as, according to the patriarch, at the beginning of 1091 the tax burden of the population of the capital and its surroundings reached an unbearable level.<sup>496</sup>

Nevertheless, until the spring of 1091, the Byzantines could rely on the unshakeable fact that the nomadic Pechenegs would not be able to hold occupied areas for a long time and that sooner or later they would leave and return to their settlements in Paradounavon. There are many references in Byzantine written sources suggesting that, if there was a general strategic concept in the long history of the Byzantine Empire, it would in a similar case surely require military commanders to avoid the classic field battle and deploy troops into fortified towns and fortresses, until enemy forces leave or are completely unable to fight due to fatigue or food and supply shortages, but also due to the spread of contagious diseases.<sup>497</sup> In these strategic considerations, the Byzantines also relied on centuries-long experience with the nomadic peoples of the steppe who rarely besieged fortified sites. In the spring of 1091, there were towns and forts located in the Pecheneg-controlled swaths of Thrace which still remained firmly in Byzantine hands.<sup>498</sup> Therefore, it can be assumed that Alexios Komnenos and his commanders followed a similar strategy in the fight against the Pechenegs, although it is not possible to determine more precisely to what

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Shepard, “Disinformation,” 251, 260–269. The issue of hypothetical Byzantine “operational code” was last dealt with in great detail by Luttwak, who eventually summarized it in seven principal points. If we thoroughly recap the actions and decisions of Alexios Komnenos during the war against the Pechenegs, we find that they strikingly match Luttwak’s theoretical reconstruction of maxima of Byzantine military strategy. See Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 415–418; Kaegi, “Logistics,” 47.

<sup>498</sup> Shepard, “Disinformation,” 256–257. In addition to large and well-fortified cities (e.g., Adrianoupolis), there were many smaller walled towns and castles in Thrace, such as Tzouroulon, Brysis (today’s Pinarhisar), Bizye (today’s Vize), and Medeia (today’s Kiziköy). See Pralong, “Fortifications,” 179–200. An exception was the city of Philippoupolis, which the Pechenegs probably seized in the spring of 1088. However, this important city did not seem to have remained in Pecheneg hands for long, since a Byzantine inscription was recently uncovered in the church near the village of Batkun (Pasardzhik District, west of Plovdiv, now Bulgaria), dating to 1090/1091 and giving the name of *doux* of Philippoupolis, Gregorios Kourkouas. This means that by 1090 at the latest, the city was again controlled by the Byzantines. See Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals 2*, 240–241; Luisa Andriollo, “Les Kourkouas (IXe – Xie siècle),” *SBS* 11 (2012): 84–85.

extent they were driven by their own beliefs, or how much they were forced to adopt it by the critical state of the Byzantine army at the time.<sup>499</sup>

In any case, the already serious situation significantly worsened in early spring 1091, when the Seljuk emir Çaka (in the *Alexiad*, Tzachas) of Smyrna<sup>500</sup> sent messengers to the Pechenegs in Thrace offering them a military alliance against the Byzantines. He asked the Pechenegs, as his allies, to take over the control of the Thracian peninsula.<sup>501</sup> Çaka was a very dangerous adversary of the Byzantines in the eastern Aegean Sea. Between 1089 and 1090, he was able to build his own pirate fleet (about forty ships strong)<sup>502</sup> and, given the desperate state of the decades-neglected and only recently slowly restored Byzantine war fleet, he managed to seize large Byzantine areas such as the towns of Klazomenai, Fokaia, Mytilene, and Methymna, and the islands of Chios, Samos, and Lesbos.<sup>503</sup> The Byzantine squadron, sent to support the Byzantine garrison in Methymna,

<sup>499</sup> Shepard, “Disinformation,” 252.

<sup>500</sup> For the name of Çaka, see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 310. Çaka’s life career was very variegated—during the reign of the emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates (1078–1081), he fell into Byzantine captivity, where he was probably baptized. Soon he managed to gain the trust of the emperor and with it he achieved high status at the imperial court and an exalted court title of *prōtonōbelissimos*. After Alexios Komnenos took the throne, the situation changed and Çaka was stripped of his duties and titles and released. See *Alexias*, VII.8.7. (p. 225); Brand, “Element,” 17; Gautier, “Défection,” 218. Greatly disappointed, Çaka then headed to the city of Smyrna in Asia Minor, which he seized, and started to build his independent power base there (a type of a pirate emirate). Böhm, *Flota*, 143–144.

<sup>501</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.2. (p. 241); Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 256, 277; Chalandon, *Essai*, 129; Zlatarski, *История*, 203; Kólias, “Πολιτική,” 258; Gautier, “Diatribes,” 10; Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 324; Aléxios G. C. Savvídís, “Ο Σελτζούκος εμίρης της Σμύρνης Τζαχάς (Çaka) και οι επιδρομές του στα μικρασιατικά παράλια, τα νησιά του ανατολικού Αιγαίου και την Κωνσταντινούπολη (c. 1081–1106),” Β’ 1090–c.1106, *Βυζαντινοτουρκικά μελετήματα* (Athens: Iródotos, 1991), 52; Angold, *Empire*, 133; Malamut, “Image,” 141; Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 139; Kovács, “Campaigns,” 178; Frankopan, *Crusade*, 59; Paroί, *Pechenegs*, 365.

<sup>502</sup> Çaka’s fleet consisted mainly of small and fast oared pirate warships with little displacement, suitable for rapid attacks on coastal sites and for ambushing larger and slower merchant vessels. *Alexias*, VII.8.1. (p. 222); Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 323; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 184; Böhm, *Flota*, 144; Gautier, “Défection,” 217–218.

<sup>503</sup> Gautier, “Diatribes,” 12, 35. Compare with the data in Alexios Komnenos’ famous letter to Count Robert of Flanders in Heinrich Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088–1100* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1973), 132–133: “*insulae principales Chios et Mitylena et multae aliae regiones et insulae, quas non ualemus modo enumerare, usque Thracias*”; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 184; Gautier, “Défection,” 217; Cheynet, “Résistance,” 145–146. For information on the Aegean islands occupied by Çaka, see Malamut, *İles*, vol. 1, 232 (Mytiléné), 236–237 (Chios), 237–239 (Samos).



commanded by *bestarchēs* Niketas Kastamonites,<sup>504</sup> was not only unable to stop him from conducting these raids, but also suffered a series of serious losses at the turn of 1090, with Çaka capturing several Byzantine vessels and immediately integrating them into his own fleet.<sup>505</sup> It was only in the summer of 1090 that the reorganized and reinforced Byzantine fleet, jointly commanded by *prōtokouropalatēs* and *doux tou stolou* Constantine Dalassenos<sup>506</sup> and *magistros* Constantine Opos,<sup>507</sup> finally inflicted defeat upon this Seljuk emir near the island of Chios and pushed him back toward Smyrna. However, the emir's withdrawal was only alleged and, above all, temporary.<sup>508</sup>

At the turn of 1091, Çaka further strengthened the battle-worthiness of his nimble pirate fleet and, with the advent of spring, initiated a new round of naval raids on the coastal areas of Byzantine Asia Minor.<sup>509</sup> In this

<sup>504</sup> Niketas Kastamonites took part in the battle of Dristra in 1087. See note 328 above. Given that he commanded the squadron of the Byzantine fleet, it can be assumed that at the turn of 1090 he held the rank of *komēs tou stolou*.

<sup>505</sup> *Alexias*, VII.8.2. (p. 223); Böhm, *Flota*, 144.

<sup>506</sup> Constantine Dalassenos was a relative of Alexios Komnenos by the empress mother Anna Dalassene. *Alexias*, VII.8.3. (p. 223). He was appointed as the commander of the fleet (*doux tou stolou*) no earlier than spring 1090. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 61–62; Guiland, “Marine,” 220. His lead seal, which also includes the title of *prōtokouropalatēs*, was published by Cheynet. See Cheynet, “Dalassenoi,” 101–103. His other brother-in-law, *sebastos* John Doukas, who had personally participated in the naval operations against Çaka only after 1092, was appointed by the emperor as the commander-in-chief (*doux tou stolou* and later *meγas doux*). For the appointment of John Doukas as the supreme commander of the fleet, see *Alexias*, VII.8.8. (p. 226); Guiland, “Marine,” 220. For his career, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 145–150. For the preserved sigillographic material of this distinguished member of the high Byzantine aristocracy, see Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 140–142.

<sup>507</sup> *Alexias*, VII.8.3. (p. 223). *Magistros* Constantine Opos took part in the battle of Dyrrachion, where he commanded the unit of the *Exkoubitai*. See note 269 in Chap. 4. During the naval operations against Çaka in the spring of 1090, he acted as a subordinate commander of Constantine Dalassenos and was entrusted with part (a squadron) of the Byzantine fleet. It is possible that he held the rank of *komēs tou stolou*, although this fact has not yet been confirmed either by written sources or by uncovered sigillographic material. Remarkably, his entire later career is firmly tied to the Byzantine fleet, of which he eventually became the commander-in-chief (*meγas doux*) sometime after 1100. See Jordanov, *Byzantine Seals* 2, 444.

<sup>508</sup> *Alexias*, VII.8.10. (p. 226); Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 323–324; Böhm, *Flota*, 147–148.

<sup>509</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.2. (p. 241); Savvidis, “Τζαχάς,” 52; Alexandrís, *Δύναμις*, 325; Kólias, “Πολιτική,” 258; Gautier, “Diatribes,” 10.

situation, the emir's offer of alliance to the Pechenegs, as well as his demand to his new allies to conquer the entire Thracian peninsula, was extremely dangerous. If Çaka's intentions were to be fully implemented, it would mean the definite end of the waiting Byzantine strategy and, at the same time, hermetic enclosure of the Byzantine capital from the sea and from the mainland. The Byzantines would be confronted with a critical situation similar to the famous great siege of Constantinople of 626 by the Avars, the Slavs, and the Persians.<sup>510</sup> It was obvious that Çaka's ultimate long-term goal was nothing less than the conquest of the Byzantine capital.<sup>511</sup> Aware of this fact, Alexios Komnenos began feverish preparations of his land and naval forces for the upcoming fight.<sup>512</sup> He also began with a flurry of diplomatic activities, sending personal letters in all directions, asking for military assistance and more mercenaries,<sup>513</sup> namely, to the pope Urban II and other rulers of western Europe.<sup>514</sup> In the end, the requested aid did not arrive (as the Byzantine emperor had hoped) from the Latin West, but the endangered Byzantine capital was rescued by another (rather unexpected) ally—the Kumans, who had just returned to the Balkans to confront the Pechenegs.

Fortunately for the Byzantines, the relatively mild winter weather grew significantly worse in February 1091 and the sudden arrival of freezing temperatures accompanied by heavy snowfall made any military operations impossible.<sup>515</sup> The weather improved only after the spring equinox.

<sup>510</sup> Madgearu, "Paradounavon," 139. The siege of Constantinople in 626 has been most recently systematically discussed by Hurbanič. See Martin Hurbanič, *Konstantinopol 626: Poslední bitka antiky* (Prague: Academia, 2016).

<sup>511</sup> Based on his short experience at the imperial court in Constantinople, Çaka was definitely aware that the Byzantine capital could only be conquered by a combined attack of land and naval forces. Since he had a war fleet and could attempt to perform a naval blockade of Constantinople, he only needed the Pechenegs to carry out a similar blockade on land. Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 256.

<sup>512</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 129; Kóliás, "Πολιτική," 258.

<sup>513</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.3. (p. 242); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 256; Zlatarski, *История*, 203.

<sup>514</sup> Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 257–258, 271–273; Chalandon, *Essai*, 129–131; Charanis, "Crusade," 27–28; Shepard, "Attitudes," 103–104. One of these letters was probably served to count Robert of Flanders, which, as the heading of the letter says, was not addressed only to him, but also to other princes in the kingdom (i.e., other important feudal lords); see Hagenmeyer, *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 130: "*Domino et glorioso comiti Flandrensium Rotberto et omnibus totius regni principibus*." See also Heinrich Hagenmeyer, "Der Brief des Kaisers Alexios I Komnenos an der Grafen Robert I von Flandern," *Byz. Zeitsch.* 6 (1897): 1–32; Marek Meško, "Otázka pravosti a datovania listu Alexia I. Komnéna grófovi Róbertovi z Flámska," *Byzantinoslovaca* 3 (2010): 64–71.

<sup>515</sup> The snowfall in Constantinople was so heavy that many of its inhabitants remained trapped in their homes. Similar weather is not uncommon in Istanbul even today. *Alexias*, VIII.3.3. (p. 241–242); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 256.

Moreover, the emperor used this unexpected delay of several weeks to send a message to Nikeforos Melissenos, who was probably in or near Thessalonica at the time,<sup>516</sup> and commissioned him to levy new recruits from among the Bulgarians and the Vlachs. Subsequently, the fresh levies were to be sent as quickly as possible to the port of Ainos at the mouth of the Maritsa river to the Aegean Sea.<sup>517</sup> Probably in mid-April 1091,<sup>518</sup> the emperor himself, accompanied by other military units, headed there from Constantinople. At the same time, he summoned the aforementioned

<sup>516</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.4. (p. 242). Nikeforos Melissenos had to leave Constantinople sometime between Alexios Komnenos' victory at Choirobakhoi and the spring equinox. His mission is also confirmed by a letter from bishop Theofylaktos of Ochrid, dated to the period of Easter Lent in 1091. Margaret Mullett, *Theophylakt of Ochrid: Reading Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, vol. 2. (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 86, 298.

<sup>517</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.4. (p. 242); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 278; Chalandon, *Essai*, 132; Zlatarski, *История*, 204; Spinei, *Migrations*, 145; Kovács, "Campaigns," 178. Today, Turkish Enez is located on the site of the Byzantine port of Ainos; see Soustal, *Thrakien*, 170–173. Very little is known about the history of Ainos during the Byzantine era, except that it was a medium-sized fortified commercial harbor dominated by a castle (ancient acropolis). Recently (from 2012 to 2018), investigations focused on ancient and medieval building structures were conducted on the site, but its finds remain still rather sketchy at best, because they were unable to provide a general idea about the layout of this Byzantine harbor. In any case a portion of the surviving city walls was built in the Middle Byzantine period, probably not before the eleventh century. See: Thomas Schmidts, "Fortifying Harbour Cities on the Southern Thracian Coast in the Early Byzantine Era – Case Studies on Ainos and Anastasioupolis," in *Seasides of Byzantium, Harbours and anchorages of a Mediterranean Empire*, edited by Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Taxiarchis G. Kolias, and Falko Daim (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2021), 222–224.

<sup>518</sup> Anna Komnene does not specify this date either. However, in the text of the *Alexiad*, she notes that the Kumans appeared on the lower Maritsa a week after Alexios Komnenos' arrival in Ainos (the emperor spent the first day after his arrival looking for a suitable place to build a camp for the Byzantine army; the next day, the Byzantines pitched the camp in Choirenoi; on the third day, the Pechenegs appeared in the area; and finally, after four days, the Kuman host also arrived). *Alexias*, VIII.3.5. ff (p. 242–243). Apparently, on the day after their arrival, the Kumans agreed with Alexios Komnenos on a ten-day period during which they were to attack the Pechenegs. *Alexias*, VIII.4.3. (p. 243). However, we certainly cannot take this whole timeframe into account, because the Kumans "forced" the Byzantines into a decisive battle a little earlier. *Alexias*, VIII.5.1. (p. 245–246). As described by Anna Komnene, the events that took place after the conclusion of the agreement cover a total of about five days (the Byzantine army crossed the Maritsa river on the third day after the arrival of the Kumans, on the fifth day there was a skirmish with the Pechenegs at the ford of Philokalos and the camp was built, and finally on the fifth day, i.e., the last day before the battle, the Byzantines moved to Mount Lebounion (*Alexias*, VIII.4.4 ff (p. 244–245)). Therefore, since his arrival in Ainos until 29 April 1091, when the battle of Lebounion took place, Alexios Komnenos stayed on the lower Maritsa for approximately two weeks.

*tagma* of 500 Flemish knights from Nikomedia to travel with him to Ainos.<sup>519</sup> The emperor's measures had a double purpose: first, the advantageous strategic location of the port allowed him to monitor and respond to the movements of the Pechenegs in Thrace and, second, he was able to comfortably maintain a connection from Ainos to the Byzantine fleet, which at that time began operations in the Aegean Sea against Çaka.<sup>520</sup> Finally, there was another, at least equally important reason to set up a base of operations in this very place—Alexios Komnenos planned to wait there for expected reinforcements of mercenaries that would hopefully arrive in time from the Latin West.

As soon as Alexios Komnenos reached Ainos, he began to look for a safe location where his small but all the more precious military forces could set up a protected camp. He boarded a small boat and sailed up the Maritsa river.<sup>521</sup> Eventually, he found a suitable site at a place known as Choirenoi, lying on the right bank of the river not far from Ainos, which was surrounded by a kind of earth rampart.<sup>522</sup> The next day, all Byzantine troops moved there and built a camp that was protected from one side by the riverbank and from the other by marshlands.<sup>523</sup> A little later, the emperor's decision proved correct, because it did not last long and the Pechenegs appeared in full force on the lowlands lying on the opposite, left bank of the Maritsa.<sup>524</sup> Like many times before, they far outnumbered the Byzantine units.<sup>525</sup> However, thanks to the providence of the Byzantine emperor, the nomads could not immediately attack the Byzantines, as their path was obstructed by the river swollen with water from melting mountain snow. Therefore, they put up their camp there and their chiefs probably tried to figure out how to get to the opposite bank as soon as possible and attack the Byzantines. Having heard of the arrival of the

<sup>519</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.5. (p. 242); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 278; Chalandon, *Essai*, 132; Ciggaar, "Flemish," 45; Frankopan, *Crusade*, 57; Pargoń, *Pechenegs*, 365.

<sup>520</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.4. (p. 242); Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 190; Kólias, "Πολιτική," 259.

<sup>521</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.5. (p. 242); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 278.

<sup>522</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.3.5. (p. 242); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 278; Zlatarski, *История*, 204; Kovács, "Campaigns," 178. The location of Choirenoi is unknown. The assumption that it was located on the right bank of the Maritsa river relies on Anna Komnene's claim that Alexios Komnenos had to sail across the river on his way back to Ainos, which lies on the left bank of the Maritsa estuary into the Aegean Sea. *Alexias*, VIII.3.5. (p. 242). The description of events also shows that the Byzantine army crossed the river twice in total and after the second crossing it remained on the left bank, where Mount Lebounion is also located. See text below.

<sup>523</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.1. (p. 243); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 278.

<sup>524</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.1. (p. 243); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 278.

<sup>525</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.1. (p. 243).

Pechenegs from his scouts, Alexios Komnenos also intensely considered plans for the upcoming decisive encounter.<sup>526</sup>

On the fourth day, however, this stalemate was dramatically reversed when the host of about 40,000 Kumans “unexpectedly” arrived in the area (in fact, it is more probable that their numerical strength amounted to about 20,000 or 10,000 warriors only).<sup>527</sup> These nomads were led by two Kuman

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid. The information about 40,000 Kumans, as reported by Anna Komnene, is clearly exaggerated. Unfortunately, there is no way to arrive at a more accurate estimate. Kovács, “Campaigns,” 180, note 25. It can be assumed that there could have been no more than half or a quarter of the number mentioned by the Byzantine princess. The arrival of the Kumans was probably not as much of a surprise to the Byzantines as Anna Komnene pretends, because the Kumans had had strong motivation to fight the Pechenegs (see text above) since 1087 at the latest. Moreover, Alexios Komnenos’ letters with a request for military aid, which the Byzantine emperor had sent not only to the Latin West but “to all sides,” also reached the Kumans. See note 513 above. According to Shepard, this call for help could be related to the lead seal of the emperor’s brother-in-law *sebastos* and *prōtostatrōr* Michael Doukas, found in Kuban in 1912. For this seal, see Bulgakova, *Bleisiegel*, 105. In the eleventh century, this territory was known as Zichia and belonged to the principality of Tmutorakan (see Pritsak, “Tmutorokan,” *ODB*, 2090), where Oleg Sviatoslavich was the ruling Riurikid prince during this period (1083–1094). He had friendly relations with the Kumans and since 1094 was on amicable terms with the khan Tugorkan. See Nestor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, transl. and ed. by Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 179–180. Although the seal cannot be accurately dated, it could be seen as a possible clue that the emperor’s request for assistance had reached the Kumans precisely through this channel. Jonathan Shepard, “Mingling with Northern Barbarians: Advantages and Perils,” *The Steppe Lands and the World beyond them*, 230. Nevertheless, the overall context of this seal may be quite different; see the text below. The claim that Alexios Komnenos had contacted the Kumans directly has been challenged recently by Kovács. In particular, in line with Anna Komnene’s testimony, she argues that the arrival of the Kumans was surprising to the emperor and that both Kuman khans were not too readily inclined to the idea of fighting the Pechenegs together at first. She also refers to the emperor’s enduring distrust of the Kuman khans and the fact that there seem to have been secret negotiations between the Pechenegs and the Kumans (see text below). Kovács, “Campaigns,” 179. As already indicated, the astonishment of Anna Komnene may indicate a sort of pretense so as not to admit that her father—the Byzantine emperor—had to beg some barbarians for help. In this vein, it was far easier to note that the Kumans arrived out of the blue. Moreover, it would have been even less acceptable for the Byzantine princess to identify the Kumans as the real saviors of the Byzantine Empire. For this reason, too, she presented their arrival as coincidental, and fully attributed the credit for luring them into the alliance and making them participate in the battle on the Byzantine side to her father (but only as a momentous diplomatic ruse, not as a result of long-term diplomatic ties and negotiations dating back to 1087 at the latest). Therefore, in my opinion, it is most likely that the Kumans came at the direct request/invitation of the Byzantine emperor. This view is also held by Shepard, who formulated it back in 1996; see Shepard, “Substance,” 83–84.

khans, Tugorkan (in the *Alexiad*, Togortak) and Boniak/Böňek (Maniak).<sup>528</sup> Alexios Komnenos immediately dispatched messengers to both khans with an invitation to a splendid banquet and negotiations during which he intended to definitively gain their military support.<sup>529</sup> Thanks to Alexios Komnenos' personal assurances at the feast, Tugorkan (and after some initial resentment, also reluctant Böňek) finally softened up and willingly accepted to fight the Pechenegs alongside the Byzantines. This achieved, both khans immediately asked the emperor for permission to attack the Pechenegs in three days. In the end, however, the two sides agreed on a

<sup>528</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.2. (p. 243): “προαγοί δὲ πάντων ὁ Τυγορτάκ, ὁ Μανιάκ”; Chalandon, *Essai*, 132; Zlatarski, *История*, 204; Aléxios G. C. Savvidis, “Οἱ Κομάνοι (Κουμάνοι) καὶ τὸ Βυζάντιο 11<sup>ος</sup>-13<sup>ος</sup> αἰ. μ. Χ.,” *Vyzantina* 13, no. 2 (1985): 946. The two supreme commanders of the Kuman host are well-known khans Tugorkan (Тугоркань) and Böňek (Бонякъ) mentioned in Russian chronicles, for example in Nestor's chronicle *The Tale of Bygone Years*. Nestor, 179 ff (Tugorkan), 182 ff (Böňek); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 279, note 2, Kovács, “Campaigns,” 185. Khan Tugorkan probably came from the Kuman tribe of Terter-oba and ruled over the right wing of the Kuman tribal union (west of the Dnieper). Omeljan Pritsak, “The Polovcians and Rus,” *AEMAE* 2 (1982): 376. The main center of this horde lay between the lower Dniester and Dnieper. Peter B. Golden, “Imperial Ideology and the Sources of Political Unity amongst the Pre-Cinggisid Nomads of Western Eurasia,” *AEMAE* 2 (1982): 68. For reconstruction of the original form of his name, see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 316. As a legendary figure, he was later adopted into Russian heroic epic poems, the so-called *byliny*. Peter B. Golden, “Cumanica V: the Basmils and Qırçaqs,” *AEMAE* 15 (2006–2007): 38–39. The other Kuman khan Böňek (Anna Komnene transcribes his name as Maniak; see text above) probably came from the Toks-oba tribe and, as the khan of the Kuman left-wing tribes (east of the Dnieper; since the mid-twelfth century this Kuman horde was in the Russian chronicles referred to as *Polovci dikii*, meaning “wild Kumans”), he had probably the highest position in the Kuman tribal union and was superior even to Tugorkan. Peter B. Golden, “The Polovci Dikii,” *HUS* 3–4 (1979–1980): 300; Golden, “Cumanica V,” 39. Pritsak argues that Böňek came from the Kaj-oba tribe. Pritsak, “Polovcians,” 368. The core territory of this horde was located on the central and lower course of the Siverskyi Donets river. Golden, “Ideology,” 68. For an overview of all Kuman tribal groups, see Peter B. Golden, “Cumanica IV: The Tribes of the Cuman-Qırçaqs,” *AEMAE* 9 (1995–1997): 99–122.

<sup>529</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.3. (p. 243); Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 280; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133; Zlatarski, *История*, 205; Angold, *Empire*, 133. The invitation of the Kumans to an opulent banquet in the presence of the emperor highlights the desperate situation in which Alexios Komnenos found himself. In fact, he badly needed to confirm the validity of the “alliance” concluded in 1087, and because of this he put aside all the recommendations of the court ceremony in dealings with barbarian chieftains, and basically negotiated with the Kuman khans as his equals. See Shepard, “Substance,” 92.

joint attack against the Pechenegs in ten days,<sup>530</sup> which shows that Alexios Komnenos tried to delay the decisive battle for as long as possible so that he could gather all likely reinforcements. Moreover, despite taking hostages from the Kumans as a guarantee of the validity of the treaty just concluded, he was still unwilling to trust his nomad allies completely. In particular, his following steps show how cautious he was toward them. When the Byzantine army finally got ready to cross the river on the just-built pontoon bridge three days after the arrival of the Kumans,<sup>531</sup> Alexios Komnenos ordered infantry units to go ahead and build a camp on the other bank, where they could wait safely before the baggage train and Byzantine cavalry crossed the river.<sup>532</sup> This measure was directed not only against a possible surprise attack mounted by the Pechenegs, but also against similar action coming from the Kumans (in case they chose to break the alliance).<sup>533</sup>

It seems that it was not only the emperor who was worried about what a united nomadic host of Pechenegs and Kumans could do to the much smaller Byzantine army. The pervasive fear of an unexpected nomad ambush almost caused havoc in the ranks of Byzantine soldiers when crossing the Maritsa. At the critical moment, an at first unidentified military detachment suddenly appeared on the western horizon lifting a cloud of dust and heading directly toward the Byzantines. The panicking soldiers were about to drop their weapons and seek salvation in the escape, as they mistook them for the Pechenegs. When this mysterious army drew nearer, it turned out that the soldiers marching toward the river were infantry and cavalry reinforcements which had been recruited by *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos and then sent without delay to

<sup>530</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.3. (p. 243); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 280; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133; Zlatarski, *История*, 205; Kólias, "Πολιτική," 259; Spinei, *Migrations*, 145.

<sup>531</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.4. (p. 244). Before the Byzantines crossed the Maritsa, there had already been minor skirmishes between the Kumans and the Pechenegs. It was only this fact that apparently convinced Alexios Komnenos of the credibility of the Kumans and the true nature of their hostile attitude toward the Pechenegs. However, he was still cautious and continued to distrust them. Shepard, "Substance," 84.

<sup>532</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.4. (p. 244).

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.* For Alexios Komnenos' distrust of the Kumans, see above. Another reason may have been the reports of secret invitations to the negotiations that, according to Anna Komnene, were sent to the Kumans by the Pechenegs in those days. *Alexias*, VIII.5.1. (p. 245); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 281; Kólias, "Πολιτική," 259.

strengthen the main core of the Byzantine army.<sup>534</sup> This intense outburst of panic and paranoia clearly shows the stress level that both the rank-and-file Byzantine soldiers and Alexios Komnenos in particular were experiencing. The next day, after overcoming the worst of the shock from the previous day, the entire Byzantine army began marching south along the left river bank to set up a new fortified camp at a site near the so-called ford of Philokalos, located not far from the mouth of the Maritsa into the Aegean Sea.<sup>535</sup> On their way, the Byzantines ran into a small group of Pecheneg warriors (possibly scouts), resulting in a fierce skirmish in which the nomads were eventually defeated and routed.<sup>536</sup> Meanwhile, the Kumans also moved closer to the Byzantine army and camped at the site where the Byzantines had previously set up their protected encampment after crossing the river.<sup>537</sup> However, even at the ford of Philokalos, the Byzantines did not feel safe and the next day they moved farther east to the Thracian mountain named Lebounion, at the foot of which they built another fortified camp.<sup>538</sup>

Before proceeding to the description of decisive events that took place at Lebounion in 1091, it is necessary to pause for a brief geographical observation. Historians usually avoid specifying the exact location of this important mountain. Soustal in his monograph suggests that the site near today's village of Karpuzlu, about twelve kilometers southwest of Ipsala, may be identified as Mount Lebounion.<sup>539</sup> Even when scanning the map, it is possible to ascertain that, apart from the uplands, there is no

<sup>534</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.5. (p. 244); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 280–281; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133. *Kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos himself was delayed by the gathering of troops and arrived at the battlefield only after the decisive battle at Lebounion. *Alexias*, VIII.6.3. (p. 250).

<sup>535</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.6. (p. 245); Zlatarski, *История*, 205

<sup>536</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.6. (p. 245); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 281.

<sup>537</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.6. (p. 245). Zlatarski mistakenly believes that the Kumans encamped at the Byzantine camp near Choirenoi. See Zlatarski, *История*, 205. The fact that the Kumans eagerly used the abandoned Byzantine field fortifications as their camping site seems to indicate that they set off for the military campaign against the Pechenegs under great time pressure and, therefore, did not bring with them wagons typical of nomadic peoples of the steppe (the Pechenegs had them, as described below), which usually served as the fortification of the nomadic encampment.

<sup>538</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.6. (p. 245). The main reason for the move of the Byzantines to the foot of Mount Lebounion was probably the local rugged terrain (especially difficult for the cavalry), which minimized the possibility of a surprise attack by the Pechenegs from the rear.

<sup>539</sup> Soustal, *Thrakien*, 333–334.



formation in the area that could be described as “*a hill dominating the plain.*”<sup>540</sup> However, roughly twelve kilometers farther to the southwest, there is a single ridge rising above the plain along the left bank of the Maritsa, the highest point of which is today known as Hisarli Dağ, with a peak at 385 meters above sea level. In the Byzantine era, a road between the port of Ainos and Kypsella ran at its foot. Therefore, it can be assumed that Hisarli Dağ should be identified with Mount Lebounion and that the last campsite of the Byzantine army before the battle had to be located there. The battle itself then took place somewhere on the plain below that stretches from the foot of this mountain in the northern direction.

Recurring changes of positions and encampments and continuous maneuvers of the Byzantine forces in the area of the lower Maritsa,<sup>541</sup> as well as the delays of the decisive battle against the Pechenegs, increasingly undermined the patience of both Kuman khans, who, on the evening of Monday, 28 April 1091, sent a message to the Byzantine emperor, informing him that they were not willing to wait any longer and that they would battle on the following day, either against the Pechenegs or against the Byzantines.<sup>542</sup> It was up to the emperor to decide which course of events would eventually unfold. Alexios Komnenos could no longer ignore the menacing undertone of the Kuman khans’ message, and although he hoped to see reinforcements coming from the Latin West until the last minute,<sup>543</sup> which would allow him not to rely only on the untrustworthy Kumans, he had to finally give in and put an end to this holding strategy. The Byzantines and the Kumans agreed that the decisive battle with the Pechenegs was to take place on the following day.<sup>544</sup> Just before sunset, the numerical strength of the imperial army was increased by the

<sup>540</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.6. (p. 245).

<sup>541</sup> The described transfers of the Byzantine army before the battle also signify extreme caution on the part of Alexios Komnenos. Frequent changes of the campsite of the Byzantine army reduced the risk of a Pecheneg surprise attack.

<sup>542</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.1. (p. 245–246): “Οἱ δὲ Κόμανοι (...) ἑσπέρας μηνύουσι τῷ βασιλεῖ «μέχρι πόσου τὴν μάχην ἀναβαλώμεθα; ἴσθι τοίνυν ὡς ἐπὶ πλέον οὐκ ἐγκαρτερήσομεν, ἀλλ’ ἡλίου ἀνατέλλοντος λύκου ἢ ἀρνειοῦ κρέας ἐδόμεθα”; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133; Zlatarski, *История*, 205. Vasil’evskij explained the meaning of the message, arguing that the expression *lykou kreas* (the flesh of wolf) was a reference to the Pechenegs (pagans) and the expression *arneiou kreas* (the flesh of lamb) to the Byzantines (Christians). See Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 281.

<sup>543</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.1. (p. 245); Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 260, 273, 281; Chalandon, *Essai*, 129, 133; Zlatarski, *История*, 205.

<sup>544</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.6. (p. 246); Vasil’evskij, “Печенеги,” 281; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133.

unexpected arrival of approximately 5000 Vlach mountaineers at the Byzantine camp.<sup>545</sup>

On Tuesday morning, 29 April 1091, the Byzantine army left the camp and arranged with the Kumans in a joint battle formation, with Alexios Komnenos, as the supreme commander of the whole united host, in the center.<sup>546</sup> The Byzantine right wing was commanded by a reliable and competent military commander, (*prōto?*) *nōbelissimos* Georgios Palaiologos, and the left wing by the aforementioned *proedros* and *doux* Constantine Dalassenos, who had earned a great reputation as the Byzantine fleet commander through his actions against the emir Çaka the previous year.<sup>547</sup> The center of the formation consisted mostly of infantry units, the wings in turn predominantly of cavalry.<sup>548</sup> Up to this point, the description by Anna Komnene is quite straightforward and clear, but further lines of text, despite detailed information, paradoxically do not make it any easier to reconstruct the deployment of the Byzantine army. The Byzantine princess does not indicate the position of individual Byzantine units only in relation to the center of the formation where the imperial banner was flying (i.e., to the right or left of the center), but also according to the geographical directions in relation to the position of the Kumans, whose exact

<sup>545</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.2. (p. 246). Anna Komnene refers to them as the “highlanders.” There have been sharp nationalistic disputes over their ethnicity. See, for example, Mátyás Gyóni, “Le nom de Βλάχοι dans l’Alexiade d’Anne Comnène,” *Byz. Zeitsch.* 44 (1951): 241–252; Vasil’evskij, “Печенегы,” 282, note 1; N. Bănescu, “Ein ethnographisches Problem am Unterlaufe der Donau aus dem XI. Jahrhundert,” *Byzantion* 6 (1931): 303–305; Chalandon, *Essai*, 133, note 3; Karagiannópoulos, *ιστορία*, I, 59, note 220. Currently, it is mostly agreed that they were indeed the Vlachs. See, for example, Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 325. See also the latest summary of this issue in Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 140; Alexandru Madgearu, “Vlach Military Units in the Byzantine Army,” *Samuel’s State and Byzantium: History, Legend, Tradition, Heritage – Proceedings of the international scientific symposium ‘Days of Justinian I, Skopje, 17–18 October 2014* (Skopje: “Euro-Balkan” University, 2015), 50.

<sup>546</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 76; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 366.

<sup>547</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 76. See text above. The archaeological finds uncovered in Bulgaria (the sites of Dristra, today’s Kalugerovo northeast of Philippoupolis, and today’s Dimitrovgrad lying on the direct line between Philippoupolis and Adrianoupolis in the Maritsa valley) include the seals of Constantine Dalassenos with the titles of *proedros* and *doux*. See Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 119–122. Once again, it would be very tempting to connect these findings to the battle of Leboundion, or to the restoration of the Byzantine administration in the provinces of Makedonia and Thrace immediately afterward.

<sup>548</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 76.

position *vis à vis* the Byzantine center is not specified at all.<sup>549</sup> Therefore, there are several possibilities as to how to overcome this paucity of information. After a careful consideration I base my further description on two basic assumptions. Firstly, I believe that the front of the Byzantine battle formation was facing the north,<sup>550</sup> and secondly, I suppose that the Kuman host was divided into two equal parts, each taking a position to the right or left of the Byzantine combat formation in order to protect its flanks and increase its potential for outflanking the enemy.<sup>551</sup> In that case, the Flemish *tagma* and the Norman *tagma* under the command of *nōbelissimos* Constantine Houmbertopoulos would be deployed on the far left side (according to Anna Komnene, to the west) of the whole combined Byzantine-Kuman formation, with Ouzas with his unit on the right side (to the east).<sup>552</sup> It follows that the role of the Flemish and Norman soldiers was apparently to outflank the Pecheneg formation and attack their right wing from the side or from the rear (in order to crush it with the sheer weight of impact of well-armored knights in tight cavalry formation, which was a specialty of western knights), whereas Ouzas and men under his command were instructed to protect the Byzantine-Kuman right flank in case the Pechenegs undertook a similar maneuver (flank guards). In that case, Monastras was deployed behind the Kumans on the right rear,<sup>553</sup> thus representing a reserve formation that, if needed, could reinforce both the right-wing Kumans and Ouzas' detachment.

Unfortunately, Anna Komnene's information on the composition of the Byzantine army and the specific units involved in the battle of Lebounion is insufficient. Nevertheless, on the basis of her descriptions of previous armed encounters and skirmishes in Thrace between 1088 and 1090, as well as on the basis of the report of the Armenian chronicler and monk Matthew of Edessa,<sup>554</sup> it is reasonable to assume that the center of the

<sup>549</sup> See the description of the deployment of the united Byzantine-Kuman army in *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247).

<sup>550</sup> This idea was first expressed by Birkenmeier. Birkenmeier, *Army*, 76.

<sup>551</sup> Anna Komnene does not explicitly mention the division of the Kuman army into two halves, but such a solution does not seem entirely improbable, since there were two supreme commanders of the Kuman host—khans Tugorkan and Böňek. Some support for such an explanation is provided in the passage of the text describing how the infantry ranks were surrounded by cavalry units; see note 548 above.

<sup>552</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247).

<sup>553</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247).

<sup>554</sup> Ara E. Dostourian, *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1972), 90: "the emperor Alexius attacked the Pecheneg forces with his army, comprising three hundred thousand Roman, Latin, Armenian and Bulgar troops." The number of soldiers under the emperor's command is, of course, exaggerated.

Byzantine combat arrangement with the emperor in the middle was formed by the *tagma* of the Varangian guard,<sup>555</sup> the emperor's personal guard,<sup>556</sup> and the *tagma* of the Normans (*Maniakatoi Latinoi*).<sup>557</sup> These were all cavalry units. However, most of the center of the Byzantine formation consisted of a less mobile infantry, made up mainly of units of the Bulgarians and the Vlachs,<sup>558</sup> as well as of the detachment of the Paulikians.<sup>559</sup> Both wings of the Byzantine assembly also possibly included the *tagma* of the *Archontopouloi*,<sup>560</sup> the *tagma* of 500 Flemish knights, and another *tagma* of Norman knights.<sup>561</sup> As stated above, the right wing was secured against possible flanking maneuvers by the nomadic Uzes in the Byzantine

<sup>555</sup> Anna Komnene does not mention the members of the Varangian guard at Lebounion specifically, but there is no reason to assume their absence. The Varangians fought in the battle of Dyrrachion in October 1081 against the Normans and also in September 1087 against the Pechenegs at Dristra. See text above.

<sup>556</sup> The emperor's personal guard is not mentioned in the description of the Byzantine battle formation, but, due to its participation in the battle of Dristra in 1087 and its involvement in the skirmishes with the Pechenegs in Thrace between 1089 and 1090 (see text above), it is more than likely that it was also present at Lebounion.

<sup>557</sup> There is no mention of this Norman unit in the Byzantine service in the *Alexiad* either. *Maniakatoi Latinoi* took part in the battles against the Pechenegs in Thrace and at the end of 1090 their command was entrusted to Basileios Kourtikios. His presence in the battle of Lebounion (although mentioned only in connection with events after the battle; see *Alexias*, VIII.6.4. (p. 251)) also probably indicates the involvement of the whole unit in the battle.

<sup>558</sup> These were fresh recruits dispatched by Nikeforos Melissenos to reinforce the Byzantine army. Bulgarians in the ranks of the Byzantine army are also referred to by Matthew of Edessa; see note 554 above. However, it is impossible to determine whether these men were ethnic Bulgarians or whether they were members of the *tagma* of the province of Bulgaria. It is also possible to add 5000 Vlachs to these fresh recruits.

<sup>559</sup> The presence of the Paulikians can be assumed on the basis of the passage of Matthew of Edessa quoted above (see note 554 above), where they are referred to as the Armenians. The Paulikians represent the only element in the Byzantine ranks that could be perceived by Matthew of Edessa in this manner.

<sup>560</sup> The cavalry unit of the *Archontopouloi* had been constantly on the battlefield since its combat premiere in 1089 (see text above) and were most likely present at the battle of Lebounion.

<sup>561</sup> The presence of Norman mercenaries in the ranks of the Byzantine army was persistent during this period. Despite the fact that a *tagma* of Norman mercenaries was virtually wiped out in the battle of Dristra in 1087, another similar unit was again active under Tatikios' command in 1090 (see text above). Therefore, the presence of such a unit in the ranks of the Byzantine army during the battle of Lebounion is more than probable, especially since we know that *nobelissimos* Constantine Houmbertopoulos was on the battlefield that day and led a unit of the "Celts" (mercenaries from the Latin West or the Normans). See *Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247). It needs to be mentioned here that Houmbertopoulos, thanks to his Norman origin, usually commanded Norman mercenaries, or mercenaries from the Latin West in general.

service.<sup>562</sup> In total, it is reasonable to assume that the overall numerical strength of the Byzantine army on the eve of the battle of Leboundion did not exceed 13,000 men. It certainly was not the full force of the Byzantine army at that time, but it has to be taken into account that many Byzantine units had to perform garrison and patrolling duties not only in the Balkans, but also in Asia Minor in defense against the Seljuk Turks.<sup>563</sup>

Soon, the attack signal was sounded and the whole allied army of the Byzantines and the Kumans started to advance slowly toward the Pechenegs. The Pechenegs also arranged in their battle formation; they relied mainly on the proven tactics of building a strong defensive fort made up of large four-wheeled wooden wagons, which provided substantial support to their combat line.<sup>564</sup> This time, however, the nomads lost the usual advantage of numerical superiority, as the longer frontline of the more numerous Byzantine-Kuman host gradually formed a crescent<sup>565</sup> and began to encircle the enemy battle formation. It is important to note here that this kind of maneuver would be very dangerous if the Pechenegs outnumbered the allied forces.<sup>566</sup> As a result, the Pechenegs were left with no choice but to resort to a fierce and desperate defense,<sup>567</sup> while the

<sup>562</sup>This identification is based on the fact that Anna Komnene consistently identifies Ouzas and Monastras as commanders of these units. Both of them had been in command of the Uzes in previous military clashes. See text above.

<sup>563</sup>This is confirmed by the order that Alexios Komnenos sent to Nikeforos Melissenos before the start of the entire campaign, in which he instructed him not to recruit into the army, if possible, men already enlisted in the army registers, veterans, and servicemen who served as garrisons of cities and fortresses, but to levy as many freshmen as possible and thus increase the numerical strength of the Byzantine military. *Alexias*, VIII.3.4. (p. 242).

<sup>564</sup>*Alexias*, VIII.5.5. (p. 247); Vasil'evskij, "Печенегы," 283.

<sup>565</sup>*Alexias*, VIII.5.6. (p. 247); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 76.

<sup>566</sup>Birkenmeier, *Army*, 76. The number of the Pecheneg warriors is difficult to estimate; yet, Anna Komnene notes that each Byzantine soldier had thirty or more captives after the battle. *Alexias*, VIII.6.1. (p. 249). Nevertheless, this figure cannot be used because, besides the Pecheneg warriors, also their wives and children took part in the campaign, and their ratio to the number of fighters is very difficult, if not impossible, to assess. In general, however, it can be assumed that the number of men in the Pecheneg host was far greater than in the Byzantine army, but smaller than in the allied Byzantine-Kuman host.

<sup>567</sup>Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 366. Anna Komnene notes that soon after the start of the battle, the Pecheneg battle formation fell apart. *Alexias*, VIII.5.7. (p. 248). I believe that this did not mean the disintegration of their units, but only that, in view of the crushing numerical superiority of the Byzantine-Kuman forces, the Pechenegs had to abandon their positions, retreat, and seek refuge behind the wagon fort. From there, they continued to resist until sunset, when they were completely surrounded and their wagon fort was breached.

Byzantines, together with the Kumans, tried to set the wagon fort on fire and break up their defensive formation.<sup>568</sup> The Pechenegs fought ferociously and the final victory had not been decided by mid-day. Accordingly, Alexios Komnenos organized water transport directly to the battlefield in an effort to invigorate and refresh his men, calling in all the peasants living nearby for assistance.<sup>569</sup> In the end, the brutal and savage battle ended just before sunset with the Pechenegs completely annihilated. Only a few of them survived or avoided captivity by fleeing from the battlefield; most of them either fell in the battle or were captured by the victorious Byzantines.<sup>570</sup> The mass slaughter of defeated enemies during the combat itself and, subsequently, their women and children after the battle rose to such enormous proportions that Anna Komnene, along with many contemporaries of the battle of Lebounion, naturally came to the erroneous conviction that the whole Pecheneg nation was wiped off the face of the Earth that day.<sup>571</sup>

Although the killing of prisoners continued throughout the night after the battle, it should be noted that despite Anna Komnene's claim of the genocide of the whole Pecheneg nation, the battle of Lebounion did not mark their end. Many nomads survived the battle, and most of them were transferred by their new Byzantine overlords to the fortress of Moglena in western Makedonia to settle the surrounding area which became suddenly

<sup>568</sup> Matthew of Edessa, 90: "Then, at a signal from the emperor Alexius, the Romans set fire to the chariots and burned them." Anna Komnene does not mention the use of fire to break up the Pecheneg wagon fort. In terms of military tactics, however, breaking it was the best way to defeat the Pechenegs, otherwise their resistance would have lasted much longer and the Byzantine victory would have been more costly in terms of casualties. A similar combat strategy was used later by Alexios Komnenos' son and successor, John II Komnenos, against the Pechenegs in the battle of Beroe in 1122. See Marek Meško, "Bitka pri Beroe 1122: Posledný boj Pečenehov," *Vojenská história* 11, no. 4 (2007): 21. On the other hand, the forces of Kiev's grand duke Mstislav Romanovich (1212–1223), surrounded by the Mongols after the battle at the Kalka river in 1223, were able to resist the repeated Mongol attacks for several days thanks to the use of the wagon fort until forced to surrender due to an acute shortage of drinking water. Nicolle, Shpakovskij, and Korol'kov, *Kalka River 1223: Gengiz Khan's Mongols Invade Russia* (London: Osprey, 2001), 74–75, 81.

<sup>569</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.8. (p. 248); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 284.

<sup>570</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.9. (p. 249); Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 366.

<sup>571</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.5.8. (p. 248–249); Vasil'evskij, "Печенеги," 284; Zlatarski, *История*, 207; Chalandon, *Essai*, 134; Kóliás, "Πολιτική," 260; Angold, *Empire*, 133; Paroń, *Pechenegs*, 366.

strategically important during the war against the Normans,<sup>572</sup> of which reliable evidence is available in later Byzantine written sources.<sup>573</sup> These Pechenegs (known as *Patzinakai Moglenitai*), along with the Uzes, the Turks, and a little later the Kumans,<sup>574</sup> served reliably in the following decades as auxiliary military troopers in the ranks of the Byzantine army.<sup>575</sup> In this new role, they were eventually met by the crusaders of the First Crusade, who, in their written accounts, left many reports of the first and often not very pleasant encounters with them on their journey through the Balkans to the Byzantine capital only a few years later.<sup>576</sup> The difference compared to the previous decades was that after this crushing defeat the Pechenegs ceased to pose a threat to the Byzantine Makedonia and Thrace.<sup>577</sup> This resulting military weakness of the nomads also made it possible to gradually restore the Byzantine administration in the territories between the lower Danube and the Haimos mountains (i.e., the former Byzantine province of Paradounavon), which almost completely broke away from Byzantine control because of the Pecheneg expansion after

<sup>572</sup> See text and note 501 in Chap. 4.

<sup>573</sup> Zonaras, 740–741; Ephraemus, *Chronografia: Κείμενο – μετάφραση – σχόλια* Οδ. Λαμψίδη. Τόμος Α' (Athens: Kéntron ekdóseos ellínou syngrafeón, 1984), 123; Angold, *Empire*, 133; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 158; Mărculeț, “Petchénègues,” 101. The first commander of the Pechenegs settled in Moglena was apparently *tourmarchēs* Joseph Maniakes, whose seal was published by Jordanov. See Jordanov, *Corpus* 1, 127; Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 273–274; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 459–460.

<sup>574</sup> See text below.

<sup>575</sup> Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 287; Angold, *Empire*, 133.

<sup>576</sup> Vasil'evskij, “Печенеги,” 322–323; Chalandon, *Essai*, 331; Shepard, “Substance,” 84–85, 123, 128. One of the many examples of their new role is the skirmish that took place between the Pechenegs and the crusaders, led by the count Baldouin of Bouillon in the spring of 1097, near the Byzantine capital. Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*. Vol. I, The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 285.

<sup>577</sup> Kovács, “Campaigns,” 185. During the war against the Pechenegs, the province of Makedonia and Thrace certainly suffered great damage, and it can be assumed that its basic military organization and garrisons in many settlements were also in need of restoration. Perhaps it is precisely the renewal and organization of local military units that were to ensure security at various locations that are linked to the findings of two seals of *meegas domestikos* of the West, *prōtosebastos* Adrianos Komnenos, uncovered at today's sites of Kazanlak and Tsareva poliana. For these seals, see Jordanov, *Corpus* 1, 79–80; Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 218–220; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 211, 366; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Seals*, 6–7.

1072.<sup>578</sup> Thus, Alexios Komnenos was finally able, at the cost of great material and human sacrifices and despite all possible obstacles, to secure the northern border of the Byzantine territory in the Balkans along the Danube river and move a step closer to the potentially more active politics in Asia Minor.

<sup>578</sup>The first military commander (*doux*) of the restored province of Paradounavon became the aforementioned *prōtoproedros* Leo Nikerites (see note 300 above) who, in connection with this new assignment, was also awarded a higher court title of *kouropalatēs*. Zlatarski, *История*, 210; Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 84; Madgearu, *Organization*, 87; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 103; Kühn, *Armee*, 226. For Leo Nikerites’ preserved lead seal with the title *doux Paradounabou*, see Shandrovskaia, “Деятели,” 41–42. Another measure that may reflect the reliability of the Vlachs incorporated in the Byzantine army ranks just before the battle of Lebounion is the likely creation of a separate military unit (*tagma*) composed and recruited exclusively from among the Vlachs coming from the Haimos mountains and deployed in the province of Paradounavon. This hypothesis is supported by the existence of a lead seal of a certain Georgios Dekanos, the general of the Vlachs (*stratēgos tōn Blachōn*), found in Issacea. For more detailed information, see Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 140; Madgearu, “Vlach,” 50. For further information about the career of Georgios Dekanos, see Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 93–94.





## Kuman Invasion (1095)

After the crushing victory over the Pechenegs, the Byzantine elites in Constantinople were probably gaining a growing impression that after a decade of essentially uninterrupted armed struggle, the emperor Alexios Komnenos had finally managed to achieve a tangible improvement of Byzantine control over key areas in the Balkans. In stark contrast to the situation in 1081, the Byzantines firmly held the Epirus coast again, which was the first line of defense against a possible seaborne attack from the Latin West, as well as the entire length of the lower reaches of the Danube, which in turn represented a solid defensive position against any nomadic incursion from the Pontic steppe. Moreover, the Normans of southern Italy were no longer dangerous at this time and the Pontic steppe was firmly under the sway of the Kumans, who were freshly sworn Byzantine allies. The only remaining security concerns worthy of note were embodied by unstable relations with the Serbian ruler of Duklja (Diokleia), Constantine Bodin. In this case, the crisis lasted until the summer of 1091, when Bodin was finally defeated by a Byzantine punitive expedition.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, there were similar controversies connected with *župan* Vlkán,

<sup>1</sup> *Alexias*, VII.8.9. (p. 226); Fine, *Balkans*, 224; Cheynet, “Serbie,” 92. See also text above.

the ruler of Raška (Rascia), between 1091 and 1094,<sup>2</sup> and finally a set of events taking place in the Western Balkans and Dalmatia triggered by offensive moves originating from the Hungarian kingdom, where Ladislaus I the Holy (1077–1095) ruled at the time.<sup>3</sup> However, these immediate Balkan neighbors of the Byzantine Empire did not pose a real threat to the empire, as was certainly the case with the Normans and the Pechenegs throughout the 1080s.<sup>4</sup> After a decade of almost constant participation in defensive military campaigns, Alexios Komnenos secured a durable peace, which allowed him to spend much more time in Constantinople than he

<sup>2</sup> *Alexias*, IX.4.1. (p. 265). *Župan Vlkan* (or Vukan; in the text of Anna Komnene introduced as Bolkanos) was a nephew of Constantine Bodin and appointed by him as the ruler of Raška together with his brother Marko in about 1083 or 1084. Tibor Zhivković, “Дукља између Рашке и Византије у првој половини XII века,” *ZRVI* 43 (2006): 453–454.

<sup>3</sup> Under the reign of this king, Hungary was pursuing an expansionist policy in the Western Balkans in order to penetrate to the Adriatic coast. This rather aggressive political course was reflected by the military occupation of Croatia that occurred probably sometime during 1091, because, at the time, Croatian kingdom was in a state of political chaos due to the recent passing of the king Zvonimir (1077–1089). *Chronicon pictum*, 406; Ferenc Makk, *Ungarische Außenpolitik (896–1196)* (Herne: Tibor Schäfer Verlag, 1999), 81. This attack did not result in the direct loss of Byzantine territory, but represented an unwelcome interference in the Byzantine sphere of influence (as well as in that of the Roman Christian church, because king Zvonimir owed his royal title to the Roman papacy). Therefore, Alexios Komnenos sent a detachment of Norman mercenaries to Dalmatia led by Godefroi of Melfi, a Norman count in the imperial service bestowed with the high court title of *sebastos*. His task was to prevent the fall of this part of Croatia into Hungarian hands. A Norman garrison remained stationed in Dalmatia until 1093. There have been debates over whether the Kuman invasion in Hungary led by Kopolch in the summer of 1091, which forced Ladislaus I to withdraw from Croatia prematurely, may have been set in motion by the skillful diplomacy of the Byzantine emperor. See Ferenc Makk, *The Árpáds and the Comneni: Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th Century* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 10–11; Ferenc Makk, “Saint Ladislaus et les Balkans,” in *Byzance et ses voisins*, ed. by Therese Olajos (Szeged: Generalia, 1994), 65; Makk, *Außenpolitik*, 82–83; Guyla Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1970), 69–70. Kovács recently disagreed with this view, believing that the Kuman invasion in Hungary in the summer of 1091 (or two close consecutive attacks, the first led by Kopolch and the second by Akos) was carried out by the Kumans of their own free will and without the instigation of the Byzantine emperor. See Kovács, “Campaigns,” 181–185. The presence of some Kuman groups on the lower Danube during the summer of 1091 could be confirmed by the somewhat enigmatic mention by Anna Komnene that her father received reports of a planned Kuman invasion into the Byzantine territory. *Alexias*, VIII.7.2. (p. 252): “λογοποιοιμένην δὲ Κομάνων ἔφοδον μανθάνων ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ.” However, the Kumans did not attack.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Serbs from Rascia led by Vlkan attacked the area around Skopje with the clear intention of looting, which implies that their military expeditions did not have any long-lasting strategic effect other than the material damage they inflicted. See *Alexias*, IX.4.31. (p. 266).

had since the beginning of May 1091. Thus, from this time onward he could truly take over the burdens of the government, which until now had been managed by his closest relatives—his elder brother *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos and his strong-willed mother Anna Dalassene.

The emperor's measures from this period included the restoration of the value of the debased Byzantine coinage<sup>5</sup> (which was long overdue) and a new revision of the collection of taxes (the so-called *nea logarike*) associated with it,<sup>6</sup> as well as the very important and hitherto unresolved affair of imperial succession.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it was because of all the military, political, and economic activities of the emperor, resulting in his exhaustion, and probably also because of his sincere desire for a lasting peace, that Alexios Komnenos did not pursue overtly aggressive policy toward his most troublesome neighbors—the Seljuks. He did not even take advantage of the extraordinarily favorable circumstances following the deaths of Seljuk sultan Malik-Shah and emir of Nikaia Abu'l-Kasim in 1092.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, another persistent opponent of Alexios, emir of Smyrna Çaka, was put to death the next year by the young Seljuk Rum sultan Kilidj Arslan (1092–1107),<sup>9</sup> but even so the

<sup>5</sup>Zonaras, 738; Angold, *Empire*, 155; Alan Harvey, "Financial Crisis and the Rural Economy," *Alexios I Komnenos—Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989*, ed. by Margaret Mullet and Dion Smythe (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996), 172; Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1999), 11; Angeliki Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 151. See note 200 in Chap. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Although the new tax collection system was not fully operational until 1106–1109. Harvey, *Expansion*, 96; Harvey, "Crisis," 179.

<sup>7</sup>Alexios Komnenos proclaimed his son John (born on 13 September 1087) as the heir to the imperial throne at the beginning of September 1092. Zonaras, 739; Chalandon, *Essai*, 138–139; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 370; Frankopan, "Kinship," 17. According to the latest findings, the coronation took place between 1 September and 15 November 1092, with the most probable dates being 1 September (beginning of the Byzantine New Year) and 13 September (the day of John's fifth birthday). Vlada Stanković, "John II Komnenos before the year 1118," *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium: in the Shadow of Father and Son*, ed. by Alessandra Bucossi and Alex R. Suarez (London: Routledge, 2016), 16–17.

<sup>8</sup>Frankopan argues that Abu'l-Kasim's execution took place sometime in 1094. Frankopan, *Crusade*, 68.

<sup>9</sup>*Alexias*, IX.3.4. (p. 265); Shepard, "Substance," 83. The execution of Çaka had to take place in 1093 at the earliest, after the return of the young Seljuk Sultan Kilidj Arslan to Nikaia from Khorasan. For placing this important political event to 1093, see Belke, "Bemerkungen," 75. Savvídís strangely assumes that this event did not occur until 1106; see Savvídís, "Τζαχάς," 101; Aléxios G. C. Savvídís, "Kilij Arslan I of Rûm, Byzantines, Crusaders and Danishmendids A.D. 1092–1107," *Vyzantina* 21 (2000): 369. The year of return of Kilidj Arslan in 1093 is also disputed; for example, Frankopan dates it to the turn of 1094/1095. See Frankopan, *Crusade*, 68.

emperor still did not attempt to restore Byzantine control over former Byzantine territories in Asia Minor.<sup>10</sup> Later on, this brief window of opportunity suitable for intervention in the East disappeared, because during 1093 and then again in late spring of 1094,<sup>11</sup> the emperor was forced to lead the Byzantine army in person against the Serbs of Rascia. The *doux* of Dyrrachion and the emperor's nephew, *sebastos* John Komnenos was unable to put a definitive end to Serb invasions in the Byzantine territory and even probably suffered a significant defeat from them in 1092.<sup>12</sup> During this military campaign with a clear punitive character, a very serious conspiracy against Alexios Komnenos led by Nikeforos Diogenes was uncovered.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, both affairs (campaign and conspiracy) ended in the emperor's personal triumph—*župan* of Rascia Vlkán was forced to become an imperial vassal,<sup>14</sup> and Diogenes' conspiracy was suppressed by the punishment of the main culprits. Nikeforos, the leader of the conspiracy, was blinded and sent into exile.<sup>15</sup> It was following all these events that the emperor was confronted with unfavorable reports of an imminent Kuman invasion. A new unexpected attack by these nomads was about to be launched against the recently pacified province of Paradounavon and the areas south of the Haimos mountains.

## 6.1 CHRONOLOGICAL SETTINGS

It has been repeatedly stated that the *Alexiad* often offers only a very limited amount of chronologically relevant information. This is very true for the account of events taking place between 1091 and 1095, or before the arrival of the participants of the First Crusade,<sup>16</sup> presenting us with insufficient historical data and a chaotic structure of the whole work not respecting chronological order and thus leaving us uncertain about the

<sup>10</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 135; Frankopan, *Crusade*, 64.

<sup>11</sup> For dating of both events see text below.

<sup>12</sup> *Alexias*, IX.4.5. (p. 267); Komatina dates both events to 1094; see Predrag Komatina, "Српски владари у Алексијади – хронолпшки оквири деловања," *ZRVI* 52 (2015): 186–187.

<sup>13</sup> Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 98–99; Peter Frankopan, "Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos: The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes," *BSI* 64 (2006): 257–274; Frankopan, *Crusade*, 80–81.

<sup>14</sup> *Alexias*, IX.10.1. (p. 280); Žihvković, "Дукља," 455.

<sup>15</sup> *Alexias*, IX.8.4. (p. 276) and IX.9.6. (p. 279); Zonaras, 742.

<sup>16</sup> Frankopan, "Challenges," 258.

exact timeframe of important events. The description of the Kuman invasion represents a typical example of this unfortunate situation, for there has been no significant consensus among scholars on its more accurate dating so far. Various historians (in particular, the elder ones) place this nomadic invasion to either 1094 or 1095; some even consider both possibilities equally probable.<sup>17</sup> In her entire very detailed narration devoted to this event, Anna Komnene does not mention a single fixed date or a year which would allow us not only to set the nomadic invasion into a more precise time frame, but also to date the individual events occurring during this attack. The same applies to the laconic description offered by another Byzantine historian, John Zonaras.<sup>18</sup> Anna Komnene typically uses only vague formulations such as “*after some time*,”<sup>19</sup> which not only fail to provide us with any specific clue to determine the duration of events or the time span between them, but also make it impossible to guess the season of the year. An exception is represented by an interesting piece of information that the Kumans lingered in the area around Adrianoupolis for a total of forty-eight days, without further details.<sup>20</sup> Of course, military campaigns are usually assumed to take place during a growing season, that is, from early spring to late autumn (sometimes exceptionally even during winter), but it is certainly not conceivable to build a more accurate dating on these vague assumptions.

<sup>17</sup>For an overview of opinions voiced by older scholars by 1978, see Petre Diaconu, *Les Coumans au Bas-Danube aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Bucarest: Académie de la République Socialiste de Roumanie, 1978), 49–50. For a more recent overview of views on the invasion prior to 2005 (although incomplete), see Frankopan, “Devgenevich, 148–149. Dating to 1094 clearly prevails in the older literature. See Kólias, “Πολιτική,” 265; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 41, 58; Angold, *Empire*, 152; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 155. Spinei offers both possibilities of dating the Kuman incursion to 1094 and 1095; see Spinei, *Migrations*, 253; Victor Spinei, *The Romanians and the Turkic Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the Tenth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 121. The year 1094 can still be found in some newer works; for instance, see Kovács, “Campaigns,” 184. In his latest monograph, Madgearu favors the dating of the Kuman invasion to 1095, although in his previous publications he dated this event to 1094. Madgearu, *Organization*, 142 (year 1095); Madgearu, “Paradounavon,” 437 (year 1094). For other authors deeming 1095 as the year in which the Kuman attack took place, see Pletneva, “Печенегы,” 220; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 99; Shepard, “Barbarians,” 231.

<sup>18</sup>Zonaras, 744.

<sup>19</sup>*Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285): “καιροῦ δὲ παρεληλυθότος.”

<sup>20</sup>*Alexias*, X.3.4. (p. 289; Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 157.

The same problems regarding dates, although with some exceptions,<sup>21</sup> applies to Anna Komnene's text that precedes the description of the Kuman invasion. It is a narration of all events from the victory over the Pechenegs to the Kuman attack—namely, the conspiracy of Ariebes and Constantine Houmbertopoulos,<sup>22</sup> the controversy over the emperor's nephew and commander of Dyrrachion *sebastos* John Komnenos,<sup>23</sup> the centrifugal tendencies of Theodoros Gabras of Trebizond,<sup>24</sup> the continuation of the naval operations against Çaka,<sup>25</sup> the simultaneous uprisings in Crete and Cyprus,<sup>26</sup> the military campaigns against the Serbs of Raška with the personal participation of John Komnenos and Nikeforos Diogenes,<sup>27</sup> and finally the suppression of the heretical teachings of Neilos of Calabria.<sup>28</sup> In this context, however, it should be recalled that not all of the events described at the end of Book VIII, Book IX, and the beginning of Book X took place in the first half of the 1090s (where Anna Komnene puts them). A typical case is the condemnation of Neilos' heretical teaching described at the beginning of Book X, which probably occurred shortly after the trial against John Italos, that is, still during the war against the Normans, but not sooner than in 1084(!).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the rebellions in Crete and Cyprus are misplaced in the *Alexiad*, as it is usually believed that they began well before 1091.<sup>30</sup> Next, there are legitimate doubts about the correct placement of the conspiracy of Ariebes and Constantine Houmbertopoulos immediately after the victory over the Pechenegs at

<sup>21</sup> See text below.

<sup>22</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.7.1. (p. 252); Zonaras, 741; Frankopan, "Challenges," 258; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 96.

<sup>23</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.7.3. (p. 252) to VIII.8.4. (p. 255); Frankopan, "Challenges," 258; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 96–97.

<sup>24</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.9.1. (p. 255) to VIII.9.7. (p. 257); Frankopan, "Challenges," 258; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 95–96.

<sup>25</sup> *Alexias*, IX.1.1. to IX.1.9 (p. 258–261) and IX.3.1. to IX.3.4 (p. 263–265).

<sup>26</sup> *Alexias*, IX.2.1. to IX.2.4 (p. 261–263); Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 97–98.

<sup>27</sup> *Alexias*, IX.4.1. to IX.10.3 (p. 265–280); Frankopan, "Challenges," 259; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 98–99.

<sup>28</sup> *Alexias*, X.1.1. to X.1.6 (pp. 281–283). The lack of chronological data is also notable in the chronicle of John Zonaras. Moreover, the order and number of events described is completely different. For instance, the description of the arrival of the crusaders of the First Crusade precedes that of the Kuman invasion(!). Therefore, Zonaras' chronicle is of very little use for us to resolve chronological ambiguities in the text of Anna Komnene. See Zonaras, 741–744.

<sup>29</sup> Guillard, "Synodikon," 203; Frankopan, "Devgenevich," 149; Frankopan, "Challenges," 264.

<sup>30</sup> Frankopan, "Challenges," 258; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 98, note 3.

Lebounion at the end of April 1091, since Constantine Houmbertopoulos obviously held a very important military command post even during the Kuman invasion a few years later.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the exceptions above allow at least a general chronological division of the period following the victory over the Pechenegs and preceding the Kuman attack. My aim is to date each of these events to a specific year, or even to a particular time of the year. The first exception providing a chronologically valuable assessment is represented by the information of Anna Komnene associated with the naval battle against Çaka in the northern Aegean Sea. Considering that operations against Çaka were under way even before the final defeat of the Pechenegs, it is logical to assume that the second part of her narration placed in the *Alexiad* after the victory at Lebounion covers the period of the remaining part of the summer of 1091 and that the naval operations resumed with the arrival of the spring the next year.<sup>32</sup> Another, chronologically more important piece of information is the statement by the Byzantine princess concerning the Serbian attack led by Vlkán, that “*the sun had twice completed its circuit since the destruction of the Scythians*,”<sup>33</sup> meaning that this attack occurred in 1093. Yet another Serbian attack took place “*before a full year had passed*,”<sup>34</sup> which can only be in early 1094. These raids into the area of today’s Skopje and Tetovo (Poloboi)<sup>35</sup> provoked a full-scale Byzantine retaliatory expedition led by the emperor in person, during which the above-mentioned Diogenes’ conspiracy took place. Therefore,

<sup>31</sup>This idea has been recently formulated by Frankopan; see Frankopan, “Challenges,” 264–264. Nevertheless, Chalandon, Gautier, Shepard, and Cheynet support the traditional view that the conspiracy of the two officers took place precisely in the context, as described in the text of Anna Komnene (in May 1091). Hence, they assume that sometime between 1091 and 1095 Houmbertopoulos was first punished and subsequently pardoned. Chalandon, *Essai*, 139; Paul Gautier, “Le synode des Blachernes (fin 1094) étude prosopographique,” *REB* 29 (1971): 240; Shepard, “Substance,” 117; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 96. Admittedly, besides Anna Komnene’s text, they also rely on the chronicle of John Zonaras where this event is mentioned in exactly the same place (its description immediately follows the narration about the Byzantine victory over the Pechenegs). See Zonaras, 741.

<sup>32</sup>*Alexias*, IX.1.2. (p. 259).

<sup>33</sup>*Alexias*, IX.4.1. (p. 265): “μετὰ διττὴν ἡλίου περιφορὰν τῆς τῶν Σκυθῶν καταλύσεως.”

<sup>34</sup>*Alexias*, IX.4.4. (p. 266): “μῆπω παρωχηκότος ὄλου {ἔτους}.”

<sup>35</sup>These areas were affected by the events of the war against the Normans in 1082 and 1083. See text above.

the sequence of events preceding the Kuman invasion seems to have ended sometime during 1094 (and not 1095).<sup>36</sup>

A question remains as to whether the Kuman invasion took place already in 1094 or in 1095. For this, it is worth recalling that Anna Komnene provides two fixed dates in connection with Diogenes' conspiracy. The former is the day when the emperor learned about it (on the eve of the feast of St Theodore the Martyr),<sup>37</sup> whereas the latter is the day of the final verdict over the main culprit Nikeforos Diogenes (the day of the Holy Apostles Saints Peter and Paul).<sup>38</sup> However, the informative value of these two crucial dates is significantly reduced by the fact that the Byzantine princess fails to provide any clue so as to determine the year, or at least the indication. In any case, combining these two dates with the assumption that the whole conspiracy falls into 1094, it is possible to pinpoint the duration of the plot very precisely between 8 and 29 June 1094.<sup>39</sup> With conspiracy revealed and the main perpetrators punished, Alexios Komnenos could resume his interrupted military expedition against the Serbs. Therefore, he was unable to return to Constantinople until early autumn. Hence, another longer-lasting event, such as the Kuman invasion (considering that only the fighting under the walls of

<sup>36</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 145–150; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 99, note 1; Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 149.

<sup>37</sup> *Alexias*, IX.7.3. (p. 273). The determination of the specific date that Anna Komnene had in mind is complicated by the fact that there are several saints in the Orthodox Church named Theodore. Moreover, in some cases, the transfer of their remains is also celebrated (e.g., in the case of St Theodore Stratelates). Therefore, it is possible to take February 8 (feast of the Martyr St Theodore Stratelates), February 17 (feast of the Martyr St Theodore Teron), or June 8 (*translatio* of the remains of St Theodore Stratelates) equally into consideration. See Frankopan, “Challenges,” 266, 270.

<sup>38</sup> *Alexias*, IX.9.6. (p. 279). Feast of St Peter and St Paul is celebrated on June 29. Chalandon, *Essai*, 151; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 98.

<sup>39</sup> Frankopan, “Challenges,” 274; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 98. Some researchers who prefer the feasts of St Theodore Stratelates (February 8) and Teron (February 17) assume that the entire conspiracy lasted for a relatively long time (from February to the end of June 1094). Chalandon, *Essai*, 150–151. However, this hypothesis is faulty for two reasons. First, if it took place in 1094, it would push the beginning of the punitive campaign against the Serbs too soon (late January and early February), so that the Serbian attacks which provoked it would necessarily take place in the middle of winter (which is not entirely impossible, but very unlikely). Second, it would mean that during the expedition against the Serbs, Alexios Komnenos spent almost four months uncovering the whole conspiracy, which is quite an implausible assumption. See Frankopan, “Challenges,” 270–271.



Adrianoupolis was supposed to last 48 days), could not take place during the rest of 1094, but rather in the next year.<sup>40</sup>

There are two other indications endorsing the previous assumption. The Kuman invasion was certainly preceded by the synod in Blachernae convened in late 1094<sup>41</sup> or, at the latest, in early 1095.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the dating of the Kuman invasion between March 1095 and the end of February 1096 corresponds to the facts contained in a relatively brief description of this event found in Nestor's *Russian Primary Chronicle*.<sup>43</sup> This date is also confirmed indirectly in this chronicle which suggests that the Kuman khan Tugorkan was absent from the lands of the Kievan Rus' during 1095 (he was leading a Kuman host in the Balkans at that time). Tugorkan is mentioned again in connection with the fight against the coalition of Rus' princes on July 19 of the following year, in the course of which he lost his life.<sup>44</sup> Given that Alexios Komnenos, after repelling the Kuman invasion, had to defend the areas around Nikaia in Asia Minor against the Seljuk invasions in that same year,<sup>45</sup> the Kuman attack most likely took place in the first half of 1095 and its beginning can be placed well before the springtime.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Pletneva, "Печенеги," 220; Frankopan, "Devgenevich," 148–149; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 99; Madgearu, *Organization*, 142. However, it should be noted that other scholars still prefer the unlikely dating of the Kuman invasion to 1094. See Chalandon, *Essai*, 151; Kólias, "Πολιτική," 265; Angold, *Empire*, 134; Spinei, *Migrations*, 253; Spinei, *Romanians*, 121.

<sup>41</sup> On the dating of the synod in Blachernae to the end of 1094, see Gautier, "Synode," 280–284. Most recently, Frankopan has presented a view that the synod was held at the very beginning of 1094. See Peter Frankopan, "Kinship and the Distribution of Power in Komnenian Byzantium," *EHR* 122 (2007): 29. It is certainly possible to discuss this view, but the different dating of the synod to the beginning or the end of 1094, or to the beginning of 1095 (see note 46 below), has no effect on the dating of the Kuman invasion to 1095.

<sup>42</sup> For the possible dating of the synod in Blachernae to the beginning of 1095, see Glavinas, *Ἔρις*, 179–180; Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α΄*, 129.

<sup>43</sup> Nestor, 180; Gautier, "Synode," 282; Frankopan, "Devgenevich," 148.

<sup>44</sup> Nestor, 182–183; Dmitrij A. Rasovskij, "Половцы," *SK* 11 (1940): 108–109; Spinei, *Migrations*, 252.

<sup>45</sup> *Alexias*, X.5.1. (p. 295ff).

<sup>46</sup> Gautier, "Synode," 283–284.

## 6.2 COURSE OF THE INVASION

Based on the detailed testimony of Anna Komnene, a former soldier of low origin coming from the town of Charax in Asia Minor,<sup>47</sup> hence called Charakenos,<sup>48</sup> significantly contributed to the genesis and build-up of the Kuman attack. By the second half of 1094, this individual started to claim that he was Leo Diogenes, the son of the former emperor Romanos IV.<sup>49</sup> Since the emperor had succeeded in suppressing the conspiracy of the true son of Romanos, Nikeforos, only recently (at the end of June 1094), Charakenos' false assertions caused a great disturbance among the wide Constantinopolitan populace. After repeated appeals, which remained unheard by Charakenos, the dismayed emperor sent him into exile to the city of Kherson in the Crimea, where his personal freedom was limited to the area of the walled city itself. Naturally, Charakenos was not satisfied with this, so he inconspicuously contacted some of the Kuman merchants in hope of finding support for his intentions to usurp the imperial throne for himself. Charakenos' fantastic promises and evocative suggestions of forthcoming lavish rewards seemed so intriguing to the Kumans that one

<sup>47</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.2. (p. 283): “ἐκ τοῦ Χάρακος ὀρμώμενος.” It is possible that in this case Anna Komnene had the town of Charax in ancient Frygia in mind, but its exact location is unknown. There is a hypothesis according to which Charax was located somewhere to the east of the town of Chonai (today's Honaz, Turkey). Belke and Merisch, *Phrygien und Pisidien*, 221. However, according to Cheynet, another eponymous city of Charax could also be found in Bithynia, not far from Nikomedia (today's Izmit, Turkey). Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 100. Most recently, the town of Charax is believed to have been located at the site of today's town of İlhan, Turkey. Belke and Koder, *Bithynien und Hellespont*, 497–498.

<sup>48</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.3. (p. 284); Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 99–100, 366. Frankopan, as the only modern scholar, rejects Anna Komnene's information about the low origin of Pseudodiogenes Charakenos and believes that he may have been the son of Romanos IV or a member of the Diogenai family. See Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 155 ff.

<sup>49</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.2. (p. 284); Rasovskij, “Половцы,” 107; Zlatarski, *История*, 210. The reason why Charakenos chose to identify himself as Leo Diogenes may have been the fact that this *porphyrogennētos* fell in the battle of Dristra in 1087 against the Pechenegs (see text above) and his body was never found. At this point, however, Anna Komnene makes an incomprehensible mistake when she further claims that Leo Diogenes died in 1074 or 1075 near Antioch. It was the eldest son of Romanos IV, Constantine, who died there and whose wife was Theodora Komnene, the older sister of Alexios Komnenos. He was not *porphyrogennētos*, however. See Bryennios, 207. Anna Komnene's very special *lapsus memoriae* has been analyzed in detail first by Diaconu and most recently by Frankopan; see Diaconu, *Coumans*, 41, note 160; Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 151ff.

night they helped him escape.<sup>50</sup> Charakenos was somehow able to convince not only the rank-and-file Kuman warriors but also their chieftains to support his cause, which eventually resulted in the gathering of a large nomadic host led by one of the two highest-ranking Kuman khans—Tugorkan.<sup>51</sup> News of what was happening in the Kuman steppe reached Alexios Komnenos (apparently via Kherson), forcing him to put military preparations in motion in order to defend Byzantine territories against the nomads. John Zonaras' account is in principle very similar,<sup>52</sup> though much briefer and with a minimum of detail, and a cursory mention is included in the text of the *Primary Chronicle*.<sup>53</sup>

Although the account presented by the Byzantine princess seems to be relatively well structured at first glance, it fails to sufficiently explain the motivation of the Kumans to break the important alliance with Alexios Komnenos that had been formed in the aftermath of the victorious battle of Lebounion.<sup>54</sup> This fact is all the more suspicious since Tugorkan was one of the two Kuman khans (the other was Bōňek) who were personally engaged in the diplomatic talks with the emperor in 1091. Anna Komnene elucidates this sudden Kuman political turn simply by stating that these nomads “*were longing eagerly to gulp down draughts of human blood and take their fill of human flesh, as well as to carry off much booty from our country...*”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, her explanation is an obvious literary cliché associated across historical periods with any nomadic *ethne*, and such a reason for breaking the Kuman-Byzantine military alliance doesn't bear up

<sup>50</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.3. (p. 285); Chalandon, *Essai*, 152; Zlatarski, *История*, 211; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 42; Shepard, “Barbarians,” 231.

<sup>51</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285); Madgearu, *Organization*, 142; Spinei, *Migrations*, 254. For Tugorkan, see note 528 in Chap. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Zonaras, 744.

<sup>53</sup> Nestor, 180.

<sup>54</sup> See text above and Shepard, “Substance,” 121–122. As part of this alliance, the Kumans may have helped to stop the advance of the Hungarian king Ladislaus I in the Western Balkans during the summer of 1091, aimed at taking control of Croatia. As a result of the sudden Kuman invasion in Hungary led by chieftain Kopoluch (it is generally believed that this attack was undertaken at Alexios Komnenos' request), the Hungarian king could not complete his conquest of all of Croatia and only captured Slavonia, whereas the Byzantine troops were promptly sent by the emperor to Dalmatia. See note 3 above.

<sup>55</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285).

to closer scrutiny.<sup>56</sup> There are other probable stimuli in the alleged dissatisfaction of the Kumans with their “high-handed” treatment by the Byzantines after the battle of Lebounion,<sup>57</sup> but even these do not sound very credible.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, in the background of the Kuman invasion a subtle diplomatic game may have originated not only between the Kumans and the Byzantines, but also between the Byzantines and the Kievan Rus'. The Kievan Rus' under the reign of the Grand Prince Sviatopolk II (1093–1113) represented the second important power center after Byzantium around which the actions of the Kumans were concentrated. The Rus' territories were under constant military pressure from these nomads,<sup>59</sup> making some noble princes of the Rurikid family (most notably Oleg Sviatoslavich of Chernigov, a grandson of the Grand Prince Iaroslav the Wise)<sup>60</sup> repeatedly form alliances with various Kuman leaders in order to pursue their own political agenda. These coalitions affected not only Kievan Rus' internal and external political relations, but also the Byzantine interests in this area, which were mainly focused on the protection of the Byzantine town of Kherson and control over the region of Tmutarakan (with its important

<sup>56</sup> See Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Asia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), xxi; Rudi P. Lindner, “What was a Nomadic Tribe?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, no. 4 (1985): 689–690.

<sup>57</sup> Diaconu, *Coumans*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, it is clear from Anna Komnene's account that after the battle of Lebounion, Alexios Komnenos ensured that the Kumans were given a large share of the spoils to make them return to their settlements fully, even excessively, satisfied. *Alexias*, VIII.6.4. (p. 250–251).

<sup>59</sup> The reason for the renewal of the hostilities was the fact that immediately after his accession to the Kievan throne on 24 April 1093 Sviatopolk II imprisoned Kuman envoys. The Kumans retaliated with a vigorous attack directed at the town of Torchesk. An attempt organized by the Rurikid princes led by Sviatopolk to protect Torchesk resulted in the battle of Stugna on May 26, which ended with a great Kuman victory. The nomads then returned to Torchesk, which they conquered and burned to the ground. The following year, dispirited Sviatopolk had to sue khan Tugorkan for peace. Tugorkan agreed on the condition that Sviatopolk would marry his daughter. Nestor, 175–179; Rasovskij, “Половцы,” 108; Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200* (New York: Longman, 1996), 272. However, even this did not alleviate the tension, and the hostilities between the Rus' and the Kumans continued.

<sup>60</sup> Oleg Sviatoslavich formed an alliance with the Kumans in 1078 and again in 1094. Nestor, 166, 179–180; Franklin and Shepard, *Rus*, 262, 266–267.

trade routes through the Kerch Strait).<sup>61</sup> Some of these political endeavors were devised so as to provoke a violent response directed against both other Rus' princes and the Byzantines. This was probably the reason (in 1094 Alexios Komnenos seems to have seized Tmutarakan from Oleg Sviatoslavich,<sup>62</sup> who was an ally of khan Tugorkan) for Tugorkan's "sudden" willingness to listen to Charakenos' persuasions, which he would likely have ignored under different circumstances, as well as the reason why he committed a flagrant violation of his alliance with the Byzantines.

Another possible incentive that can be taken into consideration is the political opportunism of the Kuman khans themselves. The sudden appearance of a candidate for the imperial throne (though very dubious) undoubtedly gave them a unique opportunity to intervene in the internal affairs of the Byzantine Empire at the highest level.<sup>63</sup> Until now, it had always been the Byzantines, as the direct heirs to Imperial Rome, who had been skillfully manipulating the various nomadic rulers of the steppe for centuries. However, the roles were about to be reversed with the Kuman khan Tugorkan pulling the reins this time. A little earlier, in the summer of 1094, Tugorkan forced the Kievan grand prince Sviatopolk II to marry his daughter, who thus became the grand princess of Kievan Rus'.<sup>64</sup> In the light of these events, it is possible to hypothesize that the opportunity to

<sup>61</sup>For possible conflicts of interest of the Kuman ally Oleg Sviatoslavich and Alexios Komnenos in the region of Tmutarakan after 1094, see Marek Meško, "A New Probable Cause of the Cuman Invasion of the Byzantine Balkans in 1095," *BSI* LXXIX (2021): 119–143. Besides gaining control over trade routes and customs revenues, the Byzantine interest in Tmutarakan was mainly of a political-military-strategic nature, because only in this area were the Byzantines able to gain access to crude oil springs. Oil was one of the main raw materials necessary for the production of the so-called Greek or liquid fire—the main deterrent weapon of the Byzantine fleet. See text above. For the principality of Tmutarakan (referred to in the Byzantine sources as *Tamatararcha*, or *ta Matrarcha*), see Pritsak, "Tmutorokan," 2090.

<sup>62</sup>See Gennadij G. Litavrin, "A propos de Tmutorokan," *Byzantion* 35 (1965): 230–231; Meško, "Cause," 137–138. It should be emphasized that the recovery of Tmutarakan, otherwise known as the "*Cimmerian Bosphorus*," in 1094 is not mentioned in the main written Byzantine sources of that time, but is revealed in the first speech of *prōtonobelissimos* Manuel Straboromanos to the emperor composed between 1108 and 1118. Paul Gautier, "Le dossier d'un haut fonctionnaire d'Alexis I<sup>er</sup> Comnène, Manuel Straboromanos," *REB* 23 (1965): 190: "... προσέθηκας [...] καὶ ὅσα παρὰ τὸν Κιμμέριον βόσπορον,...."

<sup>63</sup>Shepard, "Barbarians," 231–232.

<sup>64</sup>Nestor, 179; Rasovskij, "Половцы," 108; Pletneva, "Печенеги," 220; Franklin and Shepard, *Rus*, 272; Spinei, *Migrations*, 252.

achieve a similar position *vis à vis* Charakenos, who had undisputed aspirations for the imperial throne, could have become very tempting for the Kuman ruler who was already father-in-law of the Kievan grand prince.<sup>65</sup>

### 6.2.1 *Kuman Occupation of Paradounavon*

As in the case of the Pecheneg attack in the spring of 1087, it is not entirely clear when the Kuman invasion actually began and where it was taking place, for Anna Komnene's information about its early stages is incomplete, patchy, and chaotic. Nevertheless, her narrative suggests that Alexios Komnenos had been aware of aggressive Kuman intentions well in advance and thus decided to strengthen the defense of the endangered areas by fortifying the Haimos mountain passes (most likely by building wooden barriers).<sup>66</sup> The Byzantine princess does not reveal whether these improvised measures were supported by the deployment of military units,<sup>67</sup> since the mobilization of military forces seems to have concerned only the central imperial army so far. Measures mentioned in the *Alexiad* also suggest that the Byzantine emperor decided not to prevent the Kumans from crossing the Danube, leaving the recently acquired territory of the province of Paradounavon practically at their mercy. Instead, he was determined to defend the Byzantine territories in the Balkans with the help of a defensive line running along the main ridge of the Haimos mountains, which, as noted above, offered much better opportunities for armed resistance than the right bank of the lower Danube.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the strategic benefits it offered, this decision was unsurprising also because, prior to the recapture of the province of Paradounavon in the spring of 1091, the Haimos mountains represented the first line of defense against the nomadic inroads between 1072 and 1091. Therefore, most of the Byzantine military commanders,

<sup>65</sup> The fact that it was Tugorkan who was leading the Kuman attack against the Byzantine Empire and not a lower-ranking Kuman chieftain also supports the hypothesis that this offensive was indeed much more than just an ordinary predatory raid (at least on its onset).

<sup>66</sup> Anna Komnene does not specifically mention wooden barriers, but her information that the emperor "fortified" the mountain passes does not preclude such an interpretation. See *Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285): "κλεισούρας [...] κατοχυρώσατο." Erection of wooden obstacles (*xyloklasia*) is mentioned in the context of the later defense of mountain passes between Epirus and Makedonia on the eve of Bohemund's attack in 1107. *Alexias*, XIII.5.1. (p. 397); Madgearu, *Organization*, 144; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 207.

<sup>67</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285).

<sup>68</sup> Stephenson, *Frontier*, 105.

including Alexios Komnenos himself, had relatively ample experience in defending this area, while the territory north of the Haimos was mostly unfamiliar and alien to them. For all these reasons stated above, the emperor and his subordinates probably decided to make only nominal efforts in order to assure protection of the territories north of the Haimos. Those efforts probably consisted of a mere warning to its commander, *doux* Leo Nikerites,<sup>69</sup> to ready himself as best he could for the impending nomadic invasion.<sup>70</sup> It is also possible that the emperor indeed sent some kind of military reinforcements to Nikerites, yet written sources do not provide any specific information about their numerical strength or composition.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, the described measures failed to deter or at least slow down the nomads, for “*after some time*” the Kumans led by Charakenos moved to Paradounavon and occupied its territory.<sup>72</sup> It had been assumed that the nomadic host bypassed Dobrudja and entered the Byzantine territory near Dristra, the main center of the province, for there was a nearby ford suitable for crossing the Danube (close to today’s Dervent).<sup>73</sup> Recently,

<sup>69</sup>For Leo Nikerites, see note 300 in Chap. 5. This suggestion is supported by the fact that a lead seal of *prōtoproedros* Katakalon Tarchaneiotes was found in Dristra. This officer was probably given command over military units from Makedonia and Thrace during this period because, shortly afterward, he was charged with the defense of Adrianoupolis (where he was assisted by Nikeforos Bryennios). Tarchaneiotes may have sent a letter addressed to Nikerites in Dristra, warning him of the invasion. Ioánnis G. Leontiádis, “Die Siegel der Familie Tarchaneiotes,” *SBS* 3 (1993): 46–47; Madgearu, *Organization*, 142; see text below. The decision to leave Paradounavon unprotected also seems to have resulted from the fact that since 1091 the Byzantines were simply unable to reactivate and garrison at least some border fortresses. Spinei, *Migrations*, 254.

<sup>70</sup>It is hard not to see strong analogies with the way the Byzantines fought against the Normans, as proposed to Alexios Komnenos in 1081 on the eve of the battle of Dyrrachion by his more experienced commanders (e.g., by Georgios Palaiologos). They had advised the emperor to block the mountain passes leading from Epirus and then bide his time until the Normans gave up, ran out of supplies, or succumbed to infectious diseases. Nevertheless, the young emperor decided not to follow their advice in 1081, which had grave consequences. See text above. The relocation of the main line of defense to the mountain passes before the Kuman invasion suggests that in 1095 the emperor no longer disputed the benefits of such tactics (which he perhaps tested as early as 1087 against the Pechenegs) and devoted all his energy to its fullest possible implementation.

<sup>71</sup>This assumption is based on a hoard of bronze coins from this period, which were struck at the mint of the province of Paradounavon in today’s location of Issacea. These coins were probably intended for salaries for soldiers sent to reinforce the lower Danube defenses against the Kuman attack. See Madgearu, *Organization*, 142.

<sup>72</sup>*Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285); Spinei, *Migrations*, 254.

<sup>73</sup>Diaconu, *Coumans*, 52ff.

this hypothesis was challenged, as, based on the latest archaeological findings, the Kuman host seems to have crossed the Danube opposite the Byzantine fortress at today's site of Issacea, Romania. The Kumans apparently did not attempt to seize the fortress, but contented themselves with destruction of all buildings in its close vicinity.<sup>74</sup> The nomads then pressed on south to the town of Axiopolis, burning it to the ground.<sup>75</sup> As these events probably took place during the first months of 1095, the Kuman raiders subsequently scattered throughout the province in order to find provisions and fodder for their horses from the winter supplies of the local peasants.<sup>76</sup> The presence of the Kumans in the province of Paradounavon did not necessarily mean that the nomads took control over its entire territory. On the contrary, it seems that Dristra and other surrounding fortified places survived the attack unscathed; nor is there any evidence that the *doux* and *kouropalaṭēs* Leo Nikerites became a Kuman captive.<sup>77</sup> In any

<sup>74</sup> Madgearu, *Organization*, 105. The coin depot from Issacea could theoretically be directly related to these events. See note 77 below.

<sup>75</sup> As a consequence of these events, the bishop of Axiopolis moved his seat to Abydos in the Dardanelles. The finding of a rich hoard of gold, jewelry, and coins, including the most recent coins of Alexios Komnenos (*hyperpyra*) minted in 1092/1093, is associated with the Kuman invasion. This stock was found in 1928 near today's site of Kalipetrovo near Dristra. Spinei, "Migrations," 254; Madgearu, *Organization*, 142.

<sup>76</sup> The Kumans acted in the same way as the Pechenegs, who after crossing the Danube in 1046 plundered the winter supplies of the local peasant population. Interestingly enough, the amount of seized foodstock unusual for them gave them stomach problems. See Skylitzes, 458.

<sup>77</sup> This assertion is based on the assumption that Leo Nikerites may have received messages from other Byzantine commanders, in addition to the letter from Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs mentioned above (see note 69 above). One of them could have been John Taronites (see note 86 below), who was, together with Nikeforos Melissenos and Georgios Palaiologos, entrusted with the protection of the town of Beroe and mountain passes in its vicinity. For the lead seal on John Taronites' letter found in Dristra (Silistra-Kalaraš), which could be directly linked to the events of 1095, see Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 400–402; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 240–241. As for Leo Nikerites himself, his career rocketed after 1095, achieving a high court title of *prōtonōbelissimos* (the highest possible for a eunuch) before his death after 1116. See Werner Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegeln in Österreich*, vol. 1, Kaiserhof (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), 225–227; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 313. Another possible correspondent of Leo Nikerites during this period was probably Constantine Houmbertopoulos, who was also in charge of the protection of the passes. His lead seal with the title of *sebastos kai doux* was uncovered in Dristra. Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 314; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 491. Therefore, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which the military commanders entrusted with the protection of the mountain passes sent letters to Leo Nikerites, asking him about the current whereabouts of the Kumans on the territory of Paradounavon in order to better prepare their defensive positions before the nomad attack.



case, the troops from the province of Paradounavon, enclosed in the strongholds and walled towns, had no influence on the further course of military operations. Once the nomads finally secured their supplies and set up a camp, operations were temporarily interrupted.

When news about these developments reached Alexios Komnenos, he was first facing the dilemma of whether to reconquer the occupied territories north of the Haimos mountains with a massive military strike, or whether to risk nothing, avoid open combat against the Kumans, and wait until the Kuman threat eventually receded.<sup>78</sup> This predicament is more than understandable, since it was only in 1091 when the Byzantines renewed control over the province of Paradounavon at the cost of enormous sacrifices. For instance, the crippling defeat at the battle of Dristra in the autumn of 1087 was certainly not forgotten at the imperial court in Constantinople.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, a new war over these territories naturally could have been and surely was perceived as extremely unpopular among the Byzantine elites.<sup>80</sup> Alexios Komnenos seems to have been strongly determined to fight for these lands in order to prevent the Kumans from settling down in the province of Paradounavon permanently, as the Pechenegs had done before,<sup>81</sup> but he needed to convince the mostly disapproving Byzantine noblemen in the capital. For this reason, the emperor convened a council of his top military commanders and family relatives, who, as expected, spoke unanimously in favor of a delaying tactic. Under these circumstances, as Anna Komnene narrates, the emperor acted cunningly, as he “*did not wish to rely upon himself alone or follow his own judgment, but he referred the whole matter to God and asked Him for a decision.*”<sup>82</sup> With the assistance of the patriarch Nikolaos III the Grammarian (1084–1111), the emperor placed two sealed writing tablets on the Hagia Sophia altar, containing texts with a negative and a positive opinion of the expedition against the Kumans. After the all-night service, the patriarch selected one of the tablets in the morning,

<sup>78</sup> A similar strategy was chosen by Alexios Komnenos between 1088 and 1091 during the war against the Pechenegs. See note 497 in Chap. 5 and text above. Byzantine commanders reacted identically during the earlier invasion of the Uzes in 1064/1065. See Skylitzes, *Synechia*, 113–115; Attaleiates, 83–87.

<sup>79</sup> Chalandon, *Essai*, 152.

<sup>80</sup> In this context, it is sufficient to recall the uncompromising criticism of the patriarch of Antioch, John the Oxite, which was gaining momentum just before the victorious end of the war against the Pechenegs in the spring of 1091. See notes 490 and 496 in Chap. 5.

<sup>81</sup> This is clearly evidenced by military preparations he undertook after he first learned of the impending Kuman invasion. *Alexias*, X.2.4. (p. 285).

<sup>82</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.5. (p. 285); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 43.

unsealed it and read the sentence out—the final verdict was positive. Only at this moment was the emperor, encouraged by this (for him rather foreseeable) result, able to set in motion full-fledged military preparations to avert the ongoing Kuman attack.<sup>83</sup>

As for the numerical strength and composition of the units of the Byzantine army preparing for this defensive campaign, Anna Komnene again fails to provide any specific information. Yet, she recorded a fairly extensive list of Byzantine commanders taking part in it, based on which it is possible to arrive at some general conclusions. Namely, the Byzantine princess mentions *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos,<sup>84</sup> *sebastos* Georgios Palaiologos,<sup>85</sup> *sebastos* John Taronites,<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.5. (p. 285–286); Chalandon, *Essai*, 152–153.

<sup>84</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). Alexios Komnenos may have had hidden political motives in constant nomination of his brother-in-law to high command positions in almost all military campaigns since the beginning of his reign. Melissenos was his most serious competitor during the struggle for the imperial throne in 1081. See note 388 in Chap. 4. There were also several incidents over the years, suggesting that the *kaisar* was part of the circle critical of Alexios Komnenos' government, rather than an unconditional supporter. For an example of his bitter and envious critique of the imperial achievements in 1091, supporting this view, see *Alexias*, VIII.3.1. (pp. 240–241), and note 489 in Chap. 5. In this respect, the presence of Georgios Palaiologos in the campaign, who was appointed by the emperor as Melissenos' aide and was probably the actual commander of all units under Melissenos' "command," is very telling. Alexios Komnenos naturally had no doubts about the loyalty of this member of his close family entourage because Palaiologos had proven it repeatedly since 1081. Moreover, Nikeforos Melissenos was sent to guard a relatively quiet sector of the Haimos defensive line, which leads us to assume that he was entrusted with numerically inferior military units to the overall strength of the units remaining under the direct command of Alexios Komnenos himself. See text and note 129 below.

<sup>85</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). See text above.

<sup>86</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). John Taronites is mentioned here by Anna Komnene for the first time. He belonged to an aristocratic family of Georgian origin, which was assimilated into the Byzantine nobility at the turn of the eleventh century. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 221. His exalted position within the Byzantine court stems from the fact that he was Alexios Komnenos' nephew (son of his older and beloved sister Maria Komnene and Michael Taronites). Before taking part in the expedition against the Kumans, John Taronites held only one military post, as he probably served as the commander of the province of Boulgaria in 1092/1093 (*doux Skopion*). Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 155; Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 128–129; Mullet, *Theophylact*, 299–300. Since *prōtoproedros* Niketas Karykes was appointed to this position in 1096/1097 (see Kühn, *Armee*, 231), it is possible to assume that John Taronites still held this position in the spring of 1095. Taronites' title of *sebastos*, which was granted only to members of the closest members of the imperial family, is evidenced in the minutes of the synod held in Blachernae at the end of 1094, which he attended in person. Yet, it is only his court title *sebastos* and not any military command post that is documented, so the assumption that he was the commander of the province of Boulgaria in the spring of 1095 remains very uncertain and is rather improbable. See Gautier, "Synode," 217: "τοῦ σεβαστοῦ κύριου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ταρωνίτου."

*nōbelissimos* Michael Diabatenos,<sup>87</sup> Georgios Euforbenos,<sup>88</sup> *sebastos* and *doux* Constantine Houmbertopoulos,<sup>89</sup> Kantakouzenos,<sup>90</sup> *prōtoproedros* and *meγas primikērios tōn eō bestiariōn* Tatikios,<sup>91</sup> Ilkhan,<sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Anna Komnene refers to him only as Dabatenos, without any court title or first name. See *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). It was Gautier who identified Dabatenos with *nōbelissimos* Michael Diabatenos. This identification was deduced from the list of participants in the Blachernae synod. See Gautier, “Synode,” 245–246. Later (probably in 1098), Diabatenos became the commander (*doux*) of Trebizond. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 74.

<sup>88</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). In 1087, Georgios Euforbenos commanded a squadron of the Byzantine fleet (perhaps with the military rank of *komēs tou stolou*). See note 277 in Chap. 5.

<sup>89</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). See text above. Two lead seals of Constantine Houmbertopoulos with the titles *sebastos* and *doux* are known from this period; one was found in Pernik not far from Sofia and the other in Dristra. See Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 312–314; Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 491.

<sup>90</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). This is the first time Anna Komnene mentions Kantakouzenos. She speaks of him only in superlatives, but paradoxically does not provide his first name or any court or military title. He is also the first known member of the aristocratic family of the Kantakouzenoi, whose surname is derived from the site of Kouzena located near Smyrna in Asia Minor. Kantakouzenos’ descendants gained a leading position among the highest circles of Byzantine society (especially during the fourteenth century). See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 49–52; Kazhdan, “Kantakouzenos,” *ODB*, 1103–1104.

<sup>91</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). For Tatikios’ position and relationship to the emperor, see text above. However, only at this moment can we, thanks to the list of participants in the Blachernae synod, safely confirm his full official military title (*meγas primikērios tōn eō bestiariōn*), from which it can be inferred that he commanded the guard unit of the *Bestiaritai*. Gautier, “Synode,” 218. This could indicate that the *Bestiaritai* (see notes 229 and 240 in Chap. 4), who suffered heavy losses at the battle of Dyrrachion in October 1081, were still existing as an autonomous guard unit able (at least in theory) to be deployed against the Kumans.

<sup>92</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). Anna Komnene refers to him as Elchanes. However, Ilkhan is a Turkish military title and not a personal name (Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 124), so the real name of this Seljuk emir remains a mystery. In around 1086, Ilkhan took advantage of the hasty withdrawal of the Norman mercenaries under Constantine Humbertopoulos from Kyzikos, as they were transferred to the Balkans to face the Pechenegs (see text above), and captured the cities of Kyzikos, Apollonia, and Poimainenon on the shores of the Sea of Marmara (now in northwestern Turkey). However, his rule over these areas was short-lived, as he was almost immediately expelled by a resolute Byzantine counterattack (either as early as 1086 or in 1087). Once defeated, he was baptized and, after receiving rich gifts, entered Alexios Komnenos’ service. See *Alexias*, VI.13.2. (p. 197–198); Belke, “Bemerkungen,” 78; Bádenas, “Intégration,” 184; Bondoux, “Villes,” 388. Brand assumes that Ilkhan’s baptism took place sometime between 1092 and 1093. Brand, “Element,” 4. However, in light of Belke’s precisely elaborated chronology, it is necessary to reject this late dating. The campaign against the Kumans was to become Ilkhan’s first combat experience in the ranks of the Byzantine army.

Skaliarios,<sup>93</sup> *prōtoproedros* Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs,<sup>94</sup> *prōtonōbelissimos*  
 Nikeforos Bryennios,<sup>95</sup> *prōtokourpalatēs* Constantine Euforbenos

<sup>93</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). Skaliarios was one of Ilkhan's relatives (see note 92 above) who followed him into Byzantine service after his defeat in 1086 or 1087. See *Alexias*, VI.13.4. (p. 198); Brand, "Element," 4; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 277; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 281. It was also his first combat appearance on the side of the Byzantines.

<sup>94</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.7. (p. 287). Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs was a member of a well-known Byzantine aristocratic family of the Tarchaneiotai (Trachaneiotai) from the vicinity of Adrianoupolis. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 233. In 1078, he participated in the uprising of Nikeforos Bryennios and during the battle of Kalavrye was in charge of the left wing of the rebel army as *magistros* and *katepanō Adrianoupolēōs*. See Bryennios, 269. His sister Helena married John Bryennios, Nikeforos' younger brother. After the suppression of the uprising by the then *meγas domestikos* Alexios Komnenos, he disappeared from historical sources, only to resurface in connection with the Blachernae synod at the end of 1094 (which means that between 1081 and 1094, perhaps thanks to the intervention of Nikeforos Bryennios, he must have been granted general pardon from the emperor). Gautier, "Synode," 218, 254–255; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 286–287. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear what Anna Komnene's wording exactly implies when she says that Alexios Komnenos "*enjoined these men [Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs and Nikeforos Bryennios] to guard the fortified city [Adrianoupolis] very strictly.*" This could indicate either that Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs had become military commander (*doux/katepanō*) of the whole province of Makedonia and Thrace again (he held this position at the beginning of his career in 1077), or that he was only responsible for defending the city itself, and the post of the *doux* of the whole province was held by someone else at that time. Unfortunately, the list of commanders of the province of Makedonia and Thrace ends with Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs in 1077 or 1078, with no further holders of this title known. Kühn, *Armee*, 206–209. The inscription on his only lead seal uncovered to this day, which according to several scholars is directly linked to the events of 1095, does not contain any title or position and thus cannot provide us with any guidance for resolving this matter (*Katakalon sfragisma ton grafon tode, Trachaniotou hon skepois Theou Loge*). See Leontiádis, "Siegel," 46–47; Ioánnis G. Leontiádis, *Die Tarchaneiotai, eine prosopografisch-sigillographische Studie* (Thessalonica: Kéntro Vyzantinón Erevnón, 1998), 49. A possible candidate for this post in 1087–1091 could have been the general Nikolaos Maurokatakalon, but even this assumption cannot be confirmed. See note 243 in Chap. 5 and text above. This rather puzzling situation can be attributed to the fact that Adrianoupolis was located very close to the Byzantine capital and was a traditional base of the *meγas domestikos* of the West, who, as the supreme commander, regularly exercised control not only over forces dispatched from the capital, but also over local military units. Thus, individual *doux* of Makedonia and Thrace (if this command post was really occupied after 1078) became essentially invisible in the sources.

<sup>95</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.7. (p. 287). See text above. We also know Bryennios' lead seal from this period. See Seibt, *Bleisiegel*, 288–289.

Katakalon<sup>96</sup> and his son Nikeforos Euforbenos Katakalon,<sup>97</sup>  
 Michael(?) Monastras,<sup>98</sup> Michael Anemas,<sup>99</sup> Marianos

<sup>96</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.7. (p. 287). Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon appears here in the text of Anna Komnene for the first time, but his military career had been varied and extensive already before 1095. For instance, in 1078 he fought alongside Alexios Komnenos in the battle of Kalavrye, commanding the *Chōmatēnoi* and Seljuk allies. See Bryennios, 269. His subsequent military activities seem to have taken place outside the Balkan territory (which might be the reason why Anna Komnene does not mention him at all prior to this campaign). He was appointed as the commander (*kouropalātes* and *doux*) of Cyprus between 1092 and 1094, where he was tasked with pacifying the island's population after a failed uprising against the emperor. His appointment is not known from historical sources, but only from sigillographic material; see David M. Metcalf, *Byzantine Lead Seals from Cyprus*, vol. 1 (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2004), 224. After his return from Cyprus, Alexios Komnenos bestowed the court title of *prōtokouropalātes* on him. Gautier, "Synode," 217, 247–248; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 62–65. It seems that it was during this period that he worked his way up into the circle of the emperor's close collaborators. This elite group was badly shaken and reduced in number as a result of Diogenes' conspiracy mentioned above and, thus, in need of new members.

<sup>97</sup> Nikeforos Euforbenos Maurakatakalon is also mentioned here for the first time by Anna Komnene. In 1095, he was still very young, barely fifteen years old, as he was born around 1080. Varzós, *Γενεαλογία Α'*, 199. Later, he married Maria Komnene, the emperor's daughter and Anna Komnene's younger sister, so he became her brother-in-law. Perhaps because of close family ties between her and Nikeforos, the Byzantine princess describes his baptism by fire during the campaign against the Kumans quite vividly. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 237–238; Cheynet, Morrisson and Seibt, *Sceaux*, 25. See text below.

<sup>98</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.7. (p. 287). See note 428 in Chap. 5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* Michael Anemas was a descendant of a Byzantine aristocratic family, which derived its origin from the Arab emirs of Crete who had ruled this island before the Byzantine conquest in 961. Anna Komnene refers to him here for the first time. See also Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 200–202.

Maurokatakalon,<sup>100</sup> Ouzas,<sup>101</sup> and finally *prōtokouropalatēs* Argyros Karadja.<sup>102</sup>

At first glance at the list of commanders above, it can be assumed that, as had been the case in the previous major military expeditions of Alexios Komnenos, many of his generals were his close family relatives (either by blood or by marriage). There are recurring names, such as Alexios Komnenos' brother-in-law Nikeforos Melissenos, as well as Georgios Palaiologos, the brother-in-law of the empress Irene Doukaina, thus representing the mainstays of the Komnenian regime and the continuity in the army's higher command structures. However, the list also includes commanders entirely unknown up to this moment, suggesting that a natural generational change in the army (after all, it had already been almost fourteen years since Alexios Komnenos rose to the imperial throne) was taking place during this period. For example, Alexios Komnenos' nephew John Taronites is mentioned here by Anna Komnene for the first time. Similar tendencies can be observed based on the remaining names, among which two distinct groups of individuals can be identified—the former represents continuity with the previous “building” period of the Komnenian regime (Tatikios, Constantine Houmbertopoulos, Georgios Euforbenos, Nikeforos Bryennios, Argyros Karadja, Ouzas, and Monastras), whereas the latter embodies the recent influx of the “new

<sup>100</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.6. (p. 289). Marianos Maurokatakalon is also mentioned here for the first time. This might be due to the fact that he was too young in 1095 and only at the very beginning of his successful military career. It should be noted that Anna Komnene refers to him only thanks to his passion for combat, as he did not hold any commanding position during the Kuman campaign. His father was the Byzantine general Nikolaos Maurokatakalon mentioned above. Later, his utmost loyalty to the imperial house earned him the hand of Maria, a sister of *kaisar* Nikeforos Bryennios the Younger, who was Anna Komnene's husband. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 186–187.

<sup>101</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294). See text above.

<sup>102</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294–295). See note 331 in Chap. 5. After the successful war against the Pechenegs in the spring of 1091, Argyros Karadja was appointed to the important military position of *meγas betaireiarchēs*, which he held until March 1092. Subsequently, probably as a reward for the delicate role he played in the controversy over the commander of Dyrrachion, John Komnenos, he was granted the title of *prōtokouropalatēs* and was appointed as the commander (*doux*) of Philippoupolis. Karadja probably held this post until the Kuman invasion. Two of his lead seals with this title were found, one in the village of Dobri Dol near the present-day town of Pasardzhik, Bulgaria, and the other probably also in the vicinity of the same location; see Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 188–190. Due to the fact that Argyros Karadja appears in the *Alexiad* only during the final phase of the war against the Kumans (see text below), it is possible that both of his seals might be connected with orders related to the gathering of subordinate units from the immediate vicinity of Philippoupolis, with which he then marched against the Kumans and reinforced Byzantine units already engaged in combat.

blood” (Kantakouzenos, Ilkhan, Skaliarios, Michael Anemas, Nikeforos Euforbenos Katakalon, and Marianos Maurokatakalon) into the Byzantine army’s higher command structures.

The rather sudden appearance of some new members in the emperor’s close entourage can also be interpreted as a direct consequence of Diogenes’ conspiracy, which had significantly shaken the inner circle of Alexios Komnenos’ supporters only a year before and reduced it considerably in number.<sup>103</sup> If the imperial regime was to remain stable and firm, it was necessary to strengthen its support as soon as possible with new and absolutely loyal individuals (such as Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon). Overly unusual in this context is the striking absence of the *megas domestikos* of the West, the emperor’s younger brother *prōtosebastos* Andronikos Komnenos, who, by virtue of his position as the commander of all military units of the Western half of the Empire, should not be left out from the expedition against the Kumans. Apparently, he either took an active part in the conspiracy or at least was tacitly lending his support to it, which subsequently resulted in his complete political and military “shutdown.”<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, the absence of another prominent and experienced commander in the campaign, *prōtokouropalates* Basileios Kourtikios, who had served as a guide for the Kumans on their way to their distant homes in 1091 after the battle of Lebounion,<sup>105</sup> can be explained in a much less sensational manner. Between 1092<sup>106</sup> and 1095, Kourtikios had reached such an advanced age that the sudden ending of his active military career can be viewed as a natural consequence. Another similar example is represented by the general

<sup>103</sup> *Alexias*, IX.4.1. ff (p. 265–280). A detailed analysis of Anna Komnene’s text describing the entire course of the conspiracy was performed by Frankopan; see Frankopan, “Kinship,” 18–26. See also Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 99.

<sup>104</sup> Frankopan, “Kinship,” 26–29. Adrianos Komnenos actually disappears completely from the text of the *Alexiad* after Anna Komnene’s description of Diogenes’ conspiracy. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 7.

<sup>105</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.6.4. (p. 251).

<sup>106</sup> In 1092, Alexios Komnenos sent Kourtikios, along with three other messengers, to the Seljuk Sultan Malik-Shah in Khorasan. *Alexias*, VI.12.4. (p. 195). It is clear that after his return Kourtikios already lived as a private person before he became involved in Anemas’ conspiracy in 1097. As a result, Alexios Komnenos had all his property confiscated and sent him into exile. Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 45. Four lead seals of Kourtikios dated to the very end of the eleventh century were found at several sites in Makedonia and Thrace and the province of Paradounavon (Dristra, Dulovo, Malevo, and Fakia), containing no official titles or positions. This implies a very interesting fact that Basileios Kourtikios also had unidentified interests in the very same areas he had helped to defend between 1087 and 1091 as a military commander (perhaps as a high-ranking veteran he received certain lands from the emperor, but then obviously was stripped of them after the events of 1097). See Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, 639.

Nikolaos Maurokatakalon, who had won considerable recognition as the victor over the Pechenegs in the battle of the Koule fortress in the spring of 1087.<sup>107</sup> The natural end of his military career seems reasonable considering the fact that it was during the hostilities against the Kumans that his young son Marianos experienced his first baptism by fire.<sup>108</sup>

Based on the personal involvement of Alexios Komnenos and the analogy to his previous expeditions, it can be assumed that the central units of the Byzantine army were gathered for the upcoming expedition and that their composition was more or less identical to that in the battle of Dristra in 1087. In spite of grave losses suffered in the course of this campaign, it is likely that the Varangian guard was again marching out with the emperor to face the new opponent.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, the participation of the *tagma* of the Paulikians can be convincingly excluded, as Alexios Komnenos had dissolved this unit after his victory over the Pechenegs in 1091 due to its several rebellious manifestations dating back to 1082.<sup>110</sup> The same shameful fate befell the *tagma* of the *Athanatoi* (Immortals) after 1093. This unit had been previously stationed in Cyprus, where it took part in the revolt against the emperor,<sup>111</sup> resulting in its undoing and disbanding.

<sup>107</sup> See text above.

<sup>108</sup> See note 100 above.

<sup>109</sup> After suffering serious losses in the battle of Dristra in 1087, the Varangian guard went through a period of reconstruction, which may have been the cause of its relative invisibility in historical sources. Nevertheless, the Varangian guard seems to have taken part in the battle of Lebounion in April 1091. See text above. Later, however, this unit is explicitly mentioned in connection with Diogenes' conspiracy in 1094. See *Alexias*, IX.9.2. (p. 251): “φύλακες [...] τὰς βαρυσιδήρους ρομφαίας ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων ἔχοντες”; Blöndal, *Varangians*, 128; D'Amato and Rava, *Varangian Guard*, 9–10. Therefore, it is very likely that the Varangians took part in the fighting against the Kumans as part of the emperor's military retinue.

<sup>110</sup> Zonaras, 741. See text above.

<sup>111</sup> Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 367.



Neither the *Bigla*<sup>112</sup> nor the *Hetaireia*,<sup>113</sup> whose existence can still be theoretically assumed in 1095, participated in this campaign. From other Byzantine units located in Constantinople or its immediate vicinity, the only ones left were the emperor's personal armed retinue composed of his close relatives and servants at the imperial court,<sup>114</sup> perhaps also the remnants of the *Bestiaritai*(?),<sup>115</sup> as well as the *tagma* of Norman mercenaries whose participation in the expedition is indicated by the presence of Constantine Houmbertopoulos.<sup>116</sup>

Out of the units stationed outside the Byzantine capital, the most important certainly were the Makedonian and Thracian cavalry and infantry *tagmata*, which until 1091 bore the brunt of defensive battles in Thrace and were essentially the only major Byzantine military force composed of "domestic" Byzantine soldiers.<sup>117</sup> As in the previous campaigns during the war against the Pechenegs, the name of the military commander of these units and of the entire province (*doux Makedonias kai Thrakēs*) remains unknown. But at least some of these units were certainly placed under the command of Katakalon Tarchaneiotes, who was charged by the

<sup>112</sup> *Sub anno* 1094, the sources speak of the *Bigla* commander *prōtoproedros tēs sygklētou a megas droungarios tēs biglas* Nikolaos Mermentolos. See Gautier, "Synode," 217. Despite the fact that Anna Komnene does not mention his name in connection with the campaign against the Kumans, it is assumed that the *Bigla* (if it still existed in 1095) remained in Constantinople and continued to perform its usual (guard) duties. However, there is a second possibility, which is more probable. In 1094, *megas droungarios tēs biglas* was no longer the title of the commander of the city guard, but one of the chief judges in Constantinople. In that case, the presence or absence of his name in the written sources has nothing to do with this ancient guard unit.

<sup>113</sup> Unlike in the case of the *Bestiaritai* or the *Bigla*, we know more about the commanders of the *Hetaireia* regiment (*megas hetaireiarchēs*) immediately prior to the Kuman invasion. One of them was Argyros Karadja (see note 102 above). In 1095, the commander of the *Hetaireia* was *kouropalatēs* Constantine Antiochos. See Gautier, "Synode," 217, 250–251. Anna Komnene does not mention the name of this military commander in connection with the Kuman attack. Therefore, it is more likely that this unit did not participate in the campaign as a whole. Yet, we cannot rule out the presence of its subunits in the fighting.

<sup>114</sup> As in the battle of Dristra in 1087 or at Lebounion in 1091. See text above.

<sup>115</sup> Anna Komnene does not mention the *Bestiaritai* at all, but their possible participation can be assumed, with some objections, on the basis of the full military title of the emperor's loyal servant Tatikios (*megas primikērios tōn esō bestiaritōn*); see note 91 above. However, there is always a possibility that this was only an honorary title completely stripped of its real content (it could still have been conferred even though the unit itself no longer existed).

<sup>116</sup> Similar to all previous military encounters in which he participated in person. See text above.

<sup>117</sup> See text above. Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 370.

emperor to defend Adrianoupolis.<sup>118</sup> His “civilian” adviser was Nikeforos Bryennios the Elder, also hailing directly from Adrianoupolis.<sup>119</sup> It is very probable that at least part of the units from the province of Thessalonica (or Thessaly, i.e., the Thessalian cavalry and infantry) was engaged too, judging by the participation of *kaisar* Nikeforos Melissenos in the campaign.<sup>120</sup> Hypothetically, reinforcements from the neighboring province of Boulgaria can also be considered. As evidenced from primary sources, *sebastos* John Taronites was in charge of this province in 1092/1093 (*doux Skopiōn*) and it cannot be completely ruled out that he also held this command post during the spring of 1095.<sup>121</sup> A comprehensive list of the units taking part in the campaign against the Kumans is finally supplemented by several *ethnikoi* troops comprising nomadic Turkophone mercenaries in the Byzantine service (Seljuks, Pechenegs, and Uzes). This practice once more implies continued intensive deployment of cavalry archers in the Byzantine army after 1083.<sup>122</sup> Overall, the estimated numerical strength of the Byzantine army gathered in 1095 reached at least 10,000 but no more than 15,000 men.<sup>123</sup>

From Anna Komnene’s brief description, one gathers the impression that Alexios Komnenos marched from the capital with the core of the Byzantine army, only to be joined in Adrianoupolis by other units from Makedonia and Thrace and from Thessaly (which had already gathered there), and immediately advanced with his entire army to Anchialos on the

<sup>118</sup> See note 94 above.

<sup>119</sup> This former rebel and Alexios Komnenos’ adversary from the 1078 uprising had already served as the advisor during emperor’s campaign against the Pechenegs in 1087. See text above.

<sup>120</sup> This assumption can be based on the description of military expeditions above, beginning with the battle of Dyrrachion in October 1081. See text above.

<sup>121</sup> See note 86 above.

<sup>122</sup> This is evidenced by the names of various Byzantine military commanders who were of nomadic origin (Tatikios, Ilkhan, Skaliarios, Monastras, Ouzas, and Argyros Karadja). For example, such a unit was the *tagma* composed of the Pechenegs who had settled in Moglena after their defeat at Lebounion (*Patzinakai Moglenitai*) and incorporated into the Byzantine army. See text above and Zonaras, 740–741; Zlatarski, *История*, 209; Kühn, *Armee*, 251. See Meško, “Nomad Influences”, 66–80.

<sup>123</sup> Given the current state of research, a more accurate estimate is impossible, as it is very difficult to quantify the losses suffered by the Byzantines during the war against the Pechenegs and reckon the permanently changing numbers of mercenary units of various origins. The figure is based on the basic assumption that approximately the same units fought against the Kumans in 1095 as against the Pechenegs between 1087 and 1091, and that despite losses the overall numerical strength remained more or less identical, considering that most of the units had the opportunity to recover during the “calmer” years between 1091 and 1095.

Black Sea coast.<sup>124</sup> Needless to say, the choice of this town was not accidental, because, as mentioned above, during the war against the Pechenegs (1086 or at the turn of 1086/1087) Alexios Komnenos had had Anchialos turned into a major stronghold of the Byzantine defensive line along the main ridge of the Haimos mountains.<sup>125</sup> Subsequently, Alexios Komnenos began to send commanders at the head of individual units from Anchialos to their assigned defensive positions in order to block and defend mountain passes (*kleisourai*), thus effectively preventing the Kumans from penetrating southward to Thrace. Specifically, these were the passes in the eastern part of the Haimos mountains, starting from those north of the city of Beroe in the west and continuing toward the Black Sea coast in the east.<sup>126</sup>

With a few exceptions, Anna Komnene again fails to specify which Byzantine units were deployed to which mountain crossings. There are eleven passes between Beroe in the west and Anchialos in the east providing a possibility to cross this part of the main ridge of the Haimos mountains. The first six passes (between the towns of Beroe and Lardea) were relatively hard to access, as their altitude varied from 650 to 1190 meters above sea level.<sup>127</sup> The remaining five passes (between Goloe and Anchialos), starting with the well-known Sidera pass, offered much easier access for potential invaders coming from the province of Paradounavon southward, as their altitude did not exceed 450 meters above sea level.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>124</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286); Chalandon, *Essai*, 153; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 43; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104.

<sup>125</sup> See text and note 217 in Chap. 5. Anchialos was strategically positioned on the only north-south communication route connecting Constantinople with areas of the lower Danube (Dobrudja) still under Byzantine control, in spite of the ongoing Kuman invasion. Diaconu, *Coumans*, 47, note 158 in Chap. 2; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104.

<sup>126</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 43. Beroe represents the westernmost location mentioned in this context by Anna Komnene. It is hard to guess the extent to which Alexios Komnenos was guided by the reports of his spies shadowing the moves of the Kuman host in order to deduce which passes needed to be guarded and which garrisons further strengthened. It can only be said with certainty that the Byzantine emperor indeed had multiple spies at his disposal, who actively carried out surveillance of the enemy. This practice is evidenced by the warning of the Vlach chief Budila/Bādila about the movements of the Kumans on the lower Danube. See note 143 below.

<sup>127</sup> These include mountain passes (*prohod* in Bulgarian) in order from west to east: Shipchenski prohod (1190 m), prohod na Republikate (700 m), Tvardishki prohod (1044 m), Vratnik (940 m), Kotlenski prohod (650 m), and Varbishki prohod (900 m).

<sup>128</sup> Besides the well-known Sidera pass (today Rishki prohod, 416 m), there is also the gorge of the Luda Kamchiya river and the passes Ajtoski prohod (300 m), Djulenski prohod (440 m), and Obzorski prohod (450 m).

Therefore, it is possible that the units led by Nikeforos Melissenos, Georgios Palaiologos, and John Taronites, who were dispatched to Beroe by Alexios Komnenos, were in charge of protecting the less accessible western sector.<sup>129</sup> The eastern part, which was much more likely to be attacked by the Kumans, was personally guarded by Alexios Komnenos, who remained in Anchialos. Furthermore, the emperor seems to have retained most of the imperial army (around 10,000 men) under his command to defend the passes located between Sidera pass and the Black Sea coast. This implies that not only the units led by Kantakouzenos, Tatikios, Skaliarios, and Ilkhan, which were sent to occupy Therma in the vicinity of Anchialos,<sup>130</sup> but probably also the units under the command of Georgios Euforbenos and Constantine Humbertopoulos (whose exact location Anna Komnene does not provide for an unknown reason) were subordinated directly to the emperor.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>129</sup> *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 44. In this context, it is interesting to note that a stunning total of twelve lead seals of *sebastos* Georgios Palaiologos were found at several archaeological sites in Bulgaria (Zlati Vojvoda, northeast of Beroe; Haskovo in the Maritsa valley south of Beroe on the road between Adrianoupolis and Philippoupolis; Tatul, south of Haskovo; and Fakia, southeast of Burgas on the way from Anchialos to the Tundzha river valley). Jordanov believes that this rich finding reflects Palaiologos' intense correspondence related to the Kuman invasion (reports on the movement of the Kumans, requests for information about their intentions and probable targets, instructions and orders to local military units, etc.). For more on the findings in the locations of Zlati Vojvoda, Haskovo, and Fakia, see Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 326–329. For six lead seals found in Tatul in 2004, see Jordamov, *Corpus* 3, 236–237. The fact that it was Georgios Palaiologos' seals that were found and not, for example, seals of Nikeforos Melissenos, who held the honorary title of *kaisar* and was Palaiologos' superior, supports my assumption that the actual commander of the units deployed by Alexios Komnenos to Beroe was Palaiologos and not Melissenos. See note 84 above.

<sup>130</sup> Today's Banevo in Bulgaria, lying about 20 km west-northwest of Anchialos. As its Bulgarian as well as Byzantine names imply, it was (and still is) a place rich in natural hot mineral springs. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 477–478.

<sup>131</sup> The Byzantine princess only casually reports that Alexios Komnenos dispatched the mentioned commanders “to guard the mountain-passes round the *Zygyum*,” that is, the Haimos mountains. *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286). Given the deployment of the units commanded by Nikeforos Melissenos, Georgios Palaiologos, and John Taronites around Beroe and the units led by Kantakouzenos, Tatikios, Skaliarios, and Ilkhan, which had their headquarters at Therma (certainly including the area of the Chortarea pass), it is very likely that the units under the command of Georgios Euforbenos and Constantine Humbertopoulos were to guard the passes between these two sectors, that is, the two most strategically important passes located in this part of the Haimos mountain ridge—the Sidera pass and the breakthrough of the Luda Kamchiya river. Given the utmost importance of Sidera (as the main access road from the north to the south), this strange silence on the part of Anna Komnene is at least suspicious. See text below.

Immediately after deploying all the troops and setting up a fortified camp near Anchialos, close to the lake known to the Byzantines as Hieria Limne,<sup>132</sup> Alexios Komnenos carried out a brief inspection tour to examine the state of readiness of his soldiers guarding the passes (due to the critical time factor he probably managed to inspect only the eastern sector, however, of which only the Chortarea pass<sup>133</sup> near Anchialos is explicitly mentioned) and then he returned to Anchialos.<sup>134</sup> The reserve base in the rear of all the aforementioned positions was the city of Adrianoupolis, whose defense was entrusted to Katakalon Tarchaneiotes and Nikeforos Bryennios.<sup>135</sup> The garrison of the main center of the province of Makedonia and Thrace was, as ordered by the emperor, most likely reinforced by a cavalry unit led by Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon, Monastras, and Michael Anemas, which also provided mobile reinforcements in case the Kumans somehow overcame the defense in any of the mountain passes and penetrated further south.<sup>136</sup> The aim of all these measures was, above all, to block the Kuman advance into Thrace and, after their eventual repulsion, to ensure that, broken by their failure, they would withdraw their support to Charakenos and retreat to their territory. In the event of

<sup>132</sup>Today, either Lake Atanasovo or Lake Pomorie is considered to be the Byzantine Hieria Limne. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 477–478. Diaconu is inclined to the possibility that it is Lake Atanasovo. Diaconu, *Coumans*, 44. Given the fact that Lake Atanasovo lies relatively far (around 13 km) west of Anchialos and the description of Anna Komnene gives the impression of the immediate vicinity of the camp to the city walls (see text below), I tend to believe that Hieria Limne is today's Lake Pomorie, located immediately north of the city.

<sup>133</sup>Probably today's Dyulenski prohod located north of Anchialos. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 230. Based on the assumptions of some older researchers (such as the Nestor of Balkan history Konstantin Jireček), Diaconu favors the opinion that Chortarea has to be identified with Aytoski prohod. See Diaconu, *Coumans*, 44, note 176. I believe that the Chortarea pass is today's Dyulenski prohod because it is located closer to the city of Anchialos, where Alexios Komnenos had his main command post. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that in the event of imminent Kuman invasion, the emperor certainly did not have time to undertake long inspection trips, putting himself at risk of being caught outside his command site and, therefore, being unable to send orders to his units and receive reports of the fighting.

<sup>134</sup>*Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286); Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104. At this point, it must be stated that the measures just described correspond exactly to the defense strategy conceived by Alexios Komnenos. Their thorough preparation and subsequent effective execution suggest that Alexios Komnenos and his subordinate commanders were drawing from previous experience with the same strategy implemented as at the beginning of 1087 in the context of the war against the Pechenegs. See text above.

<sup>135</sup>*Alexias*, X.2.7. (p. 287); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 44.

<sup>136</sup>*Alexias*, X.2.7. (p. 287); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 44.

the Kuman breakthrough, all Byzantine units would be in position to seek refuge inside the walls of Beroe, Anchialos, Adrianoupolis, or other Byzantine fortresses, from where they could at least harass and ambush the advancing nomads.<sup>137</sup>

### 6.2.2 *Hostilities in Thrace*

Despite all these elaborated measures, Alexios Komnenos' defense line showed one serious weakness—the Vlach population inhabiting the mountain valleys on both sides of the Haimos mountains. The Vlachs living semi-nomadically on this “*wallachian periphery*” of the Byzantine Empire posed a similarly baffling challenge to the Byzantine administration as their close relatives living in the Pindos mountain valleys in western Makedonia and Thessaly.<sup>138</sup> According to the Vlach customary law, each Vlach community (*katuna*) recognized its own chief(s) (*čelnic*),<sup>139</sup> meaning that various communities could act completely independently and readjust their relationship with the Byzantines according to their current interests. In addition, every year from April to September most of the Vlachs scattered with their families and herds on mountain pastures located in a wide geographical area, making it difficult for the Byzantine administration to reach them.<sup>140</sup> Not surprisingly, the attitudes of different Vlach groups could vary widely—from full cooperation with the Byzantines, including the provision of men for military service (either as soldiers or as scouts, spies, and guides),<sup>141</sup> to even possible open collaboration with the

<sup>137</sup>This defensive tactic is very similar to the measures implemented by the Byzantines during the last phase of the war against the Pechenegs between 1088 and 1091. See the text above.

<sup>138</sup>See text above.

<sup>139</sup>Dasoulas, “Κοινωνίες,” 16–17; Litavrin, “Влахи,” 149. In Byzantine sources, these leaders are called *ekkritos*; see, for example, *Alexios*, X.2.6. (p. 286): “καταλαβόντος Πουδύλου τινὸς ἐκκρίτου τῶν Βλάχων.” Diaconu, *Coumans*, 57.

<sup>140</sup>Dasoulas, “Κοινωνίες,” 12–13.

<sup>141</sup>Madgearu, *Organization*, 143; Madgearu, “Vlach,” 51. For example, in connection with the organization of the province of Paradounavon after its reconquest in the spring of 1091, a unit (*tagma*) composed of the Vlachs, whose commander became Georgios Dekanos with the title of *stratēgos tōn Blachōn*, was formed. See note 578 in Chap. 5.

enemies of the Byzantine state.<sup>142</sup> One of the loyal Vlachs was a certain chief named Budilā (or Bādilā), who reached Anchialos from the lower Danube area, bringing Alexios Komnenos fresh news of other Kuman hordes crossing the river.<sup>143</sup> This could mean only one thing—as soon as the mentioned reinforcements joined the main Kuman forces already present in Paradounavon, an attack needed to be expected. A little later, other Vlachs living in the Haimos mountains decided to act exactly opposite, forming an alliance with the Kumans and leading the Kuman host along alternative paths through the Haimos mountain passes which were unguarded by the Byzantine troops, as the imperial troops were deployed only at the main crossing points.<sup>144</sup> Their action thus had a decisive impact on the later development of events and contributed to the initial Kuman success. The Kumans possibly broke through the Byzantine defense via the Luda Kamchiya river valley, making their march to the south

<sup>142</sup>Concurring fully with the Marxist perception of historical processes, Litavrin believes that the dividing line did not necessarily run between various Vlach groups, but rather between different layers (classes) of Vlach society; in other words, ancestral chiefs and “aristocracy” allegedly preferred and promoted full cooperation with Byzantine authorities, while ordinary shepherds and highlanders were more inclined to rebellions or provision of aid to the external enemies of Byzantium in exchange for the vows of liberation from the imperial yoke. See Litavrin, “Влахи,” 150. This opinion is, of course, no longer valid and is entirely outdated.

<sup>143</sup>Anna Komnene refers to this Vlach chief as Poudilos. *Alexias*, X.2.6. (p. 286); Dasoulas, “Κοινωνίης,” 30–31; Litavrin, “Влахи,” 149–150; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 57; Madgearu, “Vlach,” 51. This somewhat enigmatic information does not fit very well into the described sequence of events, as the Kumans had crossed the Danube earlier. Only once the news of their crossing reached Constantinople did Alexios Komnenos begin military preparations and fortification of the mountain passes. Therefore, it can be assumed that either this information is misplaced in the text or the Byzantine princess had in mind the arrival of other Kuman hordes that came to the lower Danube later as the main Kuman force. This assumption was formulated by Madgearu; see Madgearu, *Organization*, 143.

<sup>144</sup>*Alexias*, X.3.1. (p. 287); Chalandon, *Essai*, 153; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 57; Madgearu, *Organization*, 143; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 77; Spinei, *Migrations*, 254; Litavrin, “Влахи,” 150; Dasoulas, “Κοινωνίης,” 31; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104.

completely unnoticed.<sup>145</sup> Having achieved a complete moment of surprise, the Kumans then swiftly moved to the town of Goloe and surrounded it. The local inhabitants, facing a hopeless military situation, captured and tied the Byzantine commander of the military garrison stationed in the town and opened the gates to the waiting Kumans.<sup>146</sup>

It was *prōtokouropalatēs* Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon who reacted briskly to the reports about a surprising infiltration of the enemy troops through the Byzantine defensive line. He immediately set out from Adrianoupolis with his soldiers and approached Goloe unobserved. Even though he located the place where the Kumans had set up their camp, Katakalon did not attack the nomads directly, but rather skillfully used the moment of surprise that was still on his side. His soldiers ambushed a group of the Kumans, who set out from the camp to find fodder for their large herd of horses. The successful operation resulted in capturing about 100 nomads.<sup>147</sup> Katakalon then swiftly left the vicinity of Goloe and with his captives moved directly to Anchialos, where he joined the main part of the Byzantine army. For this courageous action, Alexios Komnenos

<sup>145</sup> It should be mentioned that so far no scholar has addressed in more detail the question of which pass(es) the Kumans finally used to cross the Haimos. Given the location of the Byzantine units and the fact that the Kuman host immediately occupied Goloe (the town known from Alexios Komnenos' campaign against Dristra in 1087; see text above) just a few kilometers south of the Sidera pass (Rishki prohod), it can be assumed that the nomads crossed the Haimos mountains via this pass. However, there are two other reasons that disqualify this seemingly logical assumption. First, Sidera, as one of the lowest crossings, represented the main communication route between the provinces of Paradounavon and Thrace (see text above), and the Byzantines would certainly not have left it undefended. On the contrary, they would have put all efforts to block and protect it as much as possible. Second, the Kuman khan Tugorkan probably knew about Sidera from his personal experience, as implied from the description of the route of the Kuman host in May 1091 when these nomads went via Sidera on their way back to the Pontic steppe after their victorious engagement in the battle of Lebounion. The Kumans were then accompanied by the Byzantine general Basileios Kourtikios. See *Alexias*, VIII.6.4. (p. 251). Therefore, it would have been irrational for the Vlachs to show the Kumans the passage across the Haimos mountains already known to some of them (apart from Tugorkan, there may have been warriors in his host who were familiar with the area south of the Haimos due to their participation in Kuman attacks in 1078, 1087, 1088, and 1091). On the other hand, the gorge formed by the Luda Kamchiya river east of Sidera could be a lesser-known alternative route and, therefore, less defended by the Byzantines.

<sup>146</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.1. (p. 287); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 57.

<sup>147</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.1. (p. 287).



rewarded him on the spot with the title of *nōbelissimos*.<sup>148</sup> The confident Kumans, unshaken by having several dozen of their fellowmen captured, continued to camp at Goloe. Messengers and representatives of other Byzantine towns and fortresses in the area (the largest and most important of them was the city of Diampolis) started coming to the Kuman camp one by one in order to surrender to Charakenos and to acknowledge him as their legitimate ruler.<sup>149</sup> By this moment, at the latest, Charakenos must have started to act as if he was a legitimate Byzantine emperor, wearing the imperial robe and insignia.<sup>150</sup> Parts of the garrisons of some of the towns and fortresses mentioned above seem to have also sided with the Kumans.<sup>151</sup>

Having consolidated their territorial gains and determined the whereabouts of the main part of the Byzantine army, the Kumans, led by Tugorkan and Charakenos, moved toward Anchialos in order to force a decisive encounter. The clear advantage on the part of the Kumans was the fact that the nomad host had a far greater numerical strength than the units available to Alexios Komnenos at the moment,<sup>152</sup> as a large number of Byzantine units still seem to have been located at their original positions protecting the mountain passes. Based on the above-mentioned maximum estimate of the

<sup>148</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.1. (p. 287): “τοῦτον ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀποδεξάμενος εὐθὺς τῷ τοῦ νοβελισίμου τιμᾷ ἀξιόματι”; Skoulatos, *Personages*, 63. The relatively rare “combat promotion” immediately after a successful action by the emperor could indicate that Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon actually had only a very small unit of several hundred soldiers at his disposal and that his real task was to perform reconnaissance and capture prisoners, rather than to charge a direct attack on the Kumans who outnumbered his unit by a large margin. Prisoners would be a welcome source of information about the intentions of the Kuman commanders and the planned direction of their further advance.

<sup>149</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.1. (p. 287); Chalandon, *Essai*, 153; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104; Spinci, *Migrations*, 255.

<sup>150</sup> The fact that Charakenos was wearing imperial garments and insignia is explicitly mentioned below in connection with the combat operations under the walls of Adrianoupolis (*Alexias*, X.3.6. (p. 290)), but if Charakenos declared himself the emperor, he had to appear as such in front of his subjects at least from the moment he and his Kuman allies entered the Byzantine territory.

<sup>151</sup> This situation was similar to that at the turn of 1081 and 1082, when the garrisons of Byzantine towns and fortresses in the border area between Epirus and western Makedonia opted to side with the Normans of Robert Guiscard after the Norman occupation of Kastoria, the strongest point of the Byzantine resistance, became widely known. See text above.

<sup>152</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.2. (p. 288): “ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ [...] μὴ ἐξαρκούσας ἔχων δυνάμεις μῆτε ἀντικαταστήναι δυνάμενος.”

size of the Byzantine forces of 15,000 men and the assumption that the emperor retained about two-thirds of this entire force under his direct command,<sup>153</sup> there could have been about 8000 to 10,000 Byzantine soldiers in Anchialos when the Kumans were approaching. Concerning the numerical strength of the Kuman host, Anna Komnene does not furnish any general information, although she mentions a little later that the Kuman chieftan Kitzes, who was Tugorkan's sub-commander,<sup>154</sup> led 12,000 Kuman warriors to Little Nikaia.<sup>155</sup> The total size of the Kuman host was clearly at least twice this number, that is, about 20,000 to 24,000 men. This figure corresponds quite well to the alleged total number of 40,000 Kumans who fought in the spring of 1091 in the battle of Leboundion on the side of the Byzantines.<sup>156</sup> Since, at that time, the whole host was commanded by the khans Bōnek and Tugorkan together, it is quite logical to assume that Tugorkan himself commanded about half (as many as 20,000 men), which is quite close to the above total estimate of 24,000 Kumans. This number certainly represents the upper limit because at the time of the Kuman invasion in the Balkans, intense fighting was simultaneously taking place between the Kumans and the troops of Rus' princes Sviatopolk II and Vladimir Monomakh in the border zone of the Kievan Rus' and the Pontic steppe.<sup>157</sup> Based on these considerations, Anna Komnene's testimony of the significant numerical superiority (at least, according to my estimate, a double) of the Kuman host can be confirmed as trustworthy.

In accordance with the ancient Roman military doctrine, Alexios Komnenos did not intend to remain with his army enclosed behind the walls of Anchialos, but rather led his units out and arranged them in a parallel line outside the city. The right wing of the tightly packed Byzantine formation rested on the seashore (or the shore of Lake Hiera Limne), whereas the left wing clung to a protruding low rocky hill covered with vineyards, which prevented the Kuman cavalry from outflanking it from this direction.<sup>158</sup> In this manner, the emperor secured for his numerically inferior forces a very strong defensive position, which could be attacked only frontally. Surrounded by the Varangians, Alexios Komnenos

<sup>153</sup> See text above.

<sup>154</sup> See note 185 below.

<sup>155</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.6. (p. 293); Rasovskij, *Половцы*, 107.

<sup>156</sup> *Alexias*, VIII.4.2. (p. 243).

<sup>157</sup> Nestor, 181. The Rus' princes attacked a large Kuman camp and looted it. In return, during the coming summer, the enraged Kumans besieged the city of Yur'ev, which they eventually conquered and burned down after its population fled to Kiev.

<sup>158</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.3. (p. 288); Chalandon, *Essai*, 153; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 77.

apparently took position in the center of the defensive formation.<sup>159</sup> The Kumans seem to have been taken aback by the apparent determination of the Byzantines to fight, as reflected by their initial inability to arrange themselves in a similarly organized battle formation, thus allowing one of the Byzantine units to perform a surprise attack against their rear guard.<sup>160</sup> Eventually, they managed to organize themselves in a battle formation against the Byzantines. However, over the next three days, neither side was willing to risk an open all-out attack. The Byzantines did not dare to move because the Kumans had a significant numerical advantage and if they attacked first, they would lose their strong defensive position. On the other hand, the Kumans were unwilling to wage a frontal attack, which would put them at risk of losing large numbers of men without being sure that such a sacrifice would bring them the desired victory.<sup>161</sup> Finally, after consulting Charakenos, the Kuman khan Tugorkan decided to postpone the fight against Alexios Komnenos' troops. Instead, he opted to retreat and march toward Adrianoupolis, the main stronghold and capital of the entire Byzantine province of Makedonia and Thrace, believing that it would fall into their hands as easily as in the case of towns and fortresses in the upper Tundzha river valley in the vicinity of Goloe and Diampolis.<sup>162</sup>

If Charakenos was hoping that the inhabitants of Adrianoupolis would enthusiastically open the gates to him and his Kuman allies, he was bitterly mistaken. On the contrary, the city's leaders—loyal generals Katakalon Tarchaneiotos and Nikeforos Bryennios (who were also members of the leading aristocratic families in the city)—manned the walls with defenders, and groups of brave inhabitants organized sallies out of the city gates every day in order to harass the Kumans.<sup>163</sup> Since Adrianoupolis had a very

<sup>159</sup> As on all previous occasions, when Alexios Komnenos personally commanded Byzantine troops in battle. See text above. On the participation of the Varangian guard in this expedition, see note 109 above.

<sup>160</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.2. (p. 288).

<sup>161</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.2. (p. 288); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 77.

<sup>162</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.2. (p. 288); Chalandon, *Essai*, 153; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 45; Spinei, *Migrations*, 255.

<sup>163</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.4. (p. 289); Chalandon, *Essai*, 153.

strong and solid defensive fortification<sup>164</sup> and the nomads were obviously not prepared for a prolonged siege of the city by sophisticated siege engines, the only option was to starve Adrianoupolis out.<sup>165</sup> Anna Komnene does not indicate the location of the Kuman camp during the siege of the city, but on the basis of one of her mentions it seems probable that they camped somewhere northwest of the city, on the right bank of the Tundzha river.<sup>166</sup> The siege lasted for a total of forty-eight days<sup>167</sup> and

<sup>164</sup>The city of Adrianoupolis was located at the bend of the Tundzha river just before its mouth into the Maritsa river. It was thus protected from three sides by water (although between the river banks and the city fortifications, a strip of land up to about 200 m wide remained in some places), and the city walls could be accessed unobstructedly only from the east. The fortifications consisted of a single wall with towers enclosing the area in the shape of a parallel quadrangle (600x800m). Their exact appearance is unknown, because besides small fragments of masonry found in the northeastern part of the city (with an inscription dedicated to the emperor John II Tzimiskes), no other portions of the city walls survived until today. The acropolis was probably located in this area, because it was also the highest point of the city. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 165. Due to the lack of systematic archaeological research, the exact architectural development of the city is still unknown, but it seems that the fortifications underwent significant rebuilding during the tenth century. In addition, the number of city gates is unidentified as well. According to the reconstruction of the ground plan of Adrianoupolis in the second century AD by the English Colonel Osmont in 1854, there were nine gates leading into the city, which were all known in the nineteenth century under their Turkish names. Only one gate led to the north, two to the west, two to the south, and as many as four gates to the east. This information is also confirmed by the description of the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril VII Adrianoupolites (1855–1860), in which he mentions eight gates. Kýrillos Adrianoupolitis, “Περιγραφή Ἀδριανουπόλεως και τινῶν τῶν πέριξ τῆς Θράκης μερῶν (α),” *Θρακικά* 2 (1929): 85. For this reason, it is difficult to accept Asdracha’s assertion that there were eight gates, always two on each side of the city. Asdracha, *Rhodopes*, 143. Anna Komnene does not mention the walls in detail or the existence of other defensive elements such as ditches or moats. However, there is a later account of the siege of Adrianoupolis by the crusaders of the Fourth Crusade in 1206 by the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates, where, in addition to the city walls, a double moat is also mentioned around the entire city perimeter. Niketas Choniates, *Historia in Nicetæ Choniatæ Historia*, CSHB, ed. B. G. Niebuhrii (Bonn: Weber, 1835): 821–822. It is possible to assume that these defensive elements strengthening the city’s defenses were already present at the end of the eleventh century.

<sup>165</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.5. (p. 289).

<sup>166</sup>The Byzantine princess states when describing the fighting a little later that, in order to attack Charakenos, Marianos Maurokatakalon had to cross the river (Tundzha) first. *Alexias*, X.3.6. (p. 290): “ὁ Μαριανός [...] ἐχώρησε πέραθεν παρὰ τῷ χεῖλει τοῦ ποταμοῦ.” This assumption is supported by the fact that when the Kumans later retreated from Adrianoupolis (and also from their camp), their first stop was at Skoutarion located approximately 23 km northwest of the city. See note 197 below.

<sup>167</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.4. (p. 289); Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 157.

during this relatively long period, food shortages slowly but surely occurred in the besieged city. The defenders managed to sneak out an envoy with a letter to the emperor in Anchialos, asking him for help.<sup>168</sup> Alexios Komnenos immediately sent the freshly promoted Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon to Adrianoupolis in order to strengthen the city garrison.<sup>169</sup> This time, however, Katakalon failed to achieve a moment of surprise, and the Kumans noticed his detachment as they were trying to slip into the city through Kalathades,<sup>170</sup> one of the Adrianoupolis suburbs.<sup>171</sup> At that point, all he could do was to retreat. During the hasty withdrawal, Constantine Euforbenos Katakalon's son Nikeforos distinguished himself by his alertness and dexterity in the saddle, knocking down one of the pursuing Kumans with a precisely aimed spear blow.<sup>172</sup>

Charakenos discerned an opportunity and sent a message to the city representatives, stating that he was willing to negotiate the terms of its surrender. The only person he wanted to meet and discuss the terms of capitulation was Nikeforos Bryennios, whom he hoped to convince that he was the true son of the former emperor Romanos IV Diogenes. Although Bryennios responded positively to this challenge, he refused to meet Charakenos in

<sup>168</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.5. (p. 289); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 45. This information suggests that the siege began in spring, and not in summer, when it would be possible for the city inhabitants to harvest and thus replenish their food supplies.

<sup>169</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.5. (p. 289); Frankopan, "Devgenevich," 156, 159.

<sup>170</sup> The location of the suburb called Kalathades is unknown. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 163. Because the name of this site evokes the production of wicker baskets, it is possible to assume that it must have been located somewhere close to the city, and within reach of the willow-lined banks of the Maritsa and Tundzha rivers. When the Ottomans seized Adrianoupolis at the turn of the 1360s and 1370s, the first mosque outside the city walls was erected during the reign of Sultan Murat I (1360–1389) in a suburb still known until today by its Ottoman name as Yıldıırım, which lies west of the city center on the right bank of the Tundzha. It is also known that this mosque was built on the foundations of a Byzantine church. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 166. This could indicate that there was an inhabited area at this place even before the arrival of the Ottomans, and could therefore hypothetically be the place where the suburb of Kalathades was located in 1095.

<sup>171</sup> Older scholars automatically assume that the attempt at an unobserved intrusion into Adrianoupolis must have taken place at night. See Diaconu, *Coumans*, 45.

<sup>172</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.5. (p. 289); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 45. While describing this episode, Anna Komnene fails to hide her enthusiasm for the military capabilities of young Nikeforos, and particularly admires his skillful handling of the spear to such an extent that it is as if he were not a Byzantine at all, but of Norman origin ("οὐ Ῥωμαίων εἴκασεν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ Νορμανόθεν ἦκειν"). It is also a very eloquent proof of the adoption of a technique hitherto typical for Western knights (especially the Normans) by the Byzantine cavalry during this period, certainly due to the hard lessons learned during the war against the Normans of Robert Guiscard.

person. Instead, he climbed one of the fortified city towers<sup>173</sup> and, after a short conversation with Charakenos in a genuine Solomonic manner, replied that his voice did not sound like that of the true son of Diogenes, whom he had once known.<sup>174</sup> Bryennios' subtle statement thus effectively amounted to a direct denial of Charakenos' claims to the imperial throne and refusal to surrender the city of Adrianoupolis to him. Thanks to Bryennios, the inhabitants of the city remained loyal to Alexios Komnenos and refused to open the gates to the Kumans. Unsurprisingly, immediately after the meeting, Bryennios organized a bold sally against the Kumans, during which a good number of soldiers fell on both sides.<sup>175</sup> In the course of this clash, young Marianos Maurokatakalon distinguished himself, charging bravely at the Kuman khan Tugorkan himself. His attack was so fierce that he would have stricken him with a spear had the khan's bodyguards not intervened. Maurokatakalon then wheeled about and charged against Charakenos, who was dressed in purple vestments with all the imperial insignia, and since he was also well protected by his bodyguards, he dealt him at least a quick blow on the head with his riding whip, showering him with profanities as he withdrew.<sup>176</sup> After this attack, the defenders retreated to the safety of the city walls.

<sup>173</sup> Given the logical assumption that Nikeforos Bryennios, as the commander of Adrianoupolis defenses, was present mainly in the area of the city acropolis located at the northwestern tip of the city fortifications, there is a possibility that his famous conversation with Charakenos took place there. Part of the walls can be found there even today, with a single tower dating to the Byzantine period (*Makedonija kulesi*). See note 164 above.

<sup>174</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.4. (p. 289): “Νικηφόρος ὁ Βρυέννιος [...] πυργόθεν προσκύψας, ὅσα γε ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τεκμαιρόμενος ἔλεγε μήτε νιδὸν αὐτὸν ἐπιγινώσκειν Ῥωμανοῦ τοῦ Διογένηος”; Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 156–157.

<sup>175</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.6. (p. 289); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 45. Regarding this episode, it is interesting that although the commander of the city defense was, according to Anna Komnene, Katakalon Tarchaneiotēs, and Bryennios was only in a position to give him well-founded advice because of his blindness (see text above), the Byzantine princess mentions here only Bryennios. It is possible that Tarchaneiotēs, for an unspecified reason, was either not in the city at this particular moment or was somehow indisposed (possibly wounded?). The first possibility is indicated by Anna Komnene's further mention that Tarchaneiotēs was ordered by the emperor to follow the Kuman army, that is, to take care of military operations taking place outside the city walls; see *Alexias*, X.4.5. (p. 292); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 46. Finally, it is equally possible that the Byzantine princess mentions Bryennios' higher court title of *prōtonobelīssimos*, while Tarchaneiotēs was “only” *prōtokouropalatēs* (two full ranks lower), so that except for the introductory passage, she chooses to mention only Bryennios in the rest of the text because of his more exalted position and closer family ties with herself.

<sup>176</sup> *Alexias*, X.3.6. (p. 289–290): “ὁ Μαρριανὸς [...] ἀνατείνας τηνικαῦτα τὴν μάλιστα ἔπαιε τοῦτον κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἀφειδῶς ψευδῶν μιν ἀποκαλῶν βασιλέα”; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 45.

Alexios Komnenos was apparently kept well informed about the course of the siege and gradually came to the conclusion that he must hasten to rescue the city inhabitants with the entire imperial army, even at the cost of risking a pitched battle, in which the Kumans would have a numerical advantage. Like many times before under similar circumstances, the emperor convened a council of his top military commanders in Anchialos in order to make a decision about the next steps to be taken.<sup>177</sup> However, before any conclusion was reached, a man named Alakaseus approached the emperor, claiming that he knew how to lure Charakenos out of the Kuman camp and eventually seize him.<sup>178</sup> After hearing out his cunning plan in private, Alexios Komnenos entrusted Alakaseus with its implementation. Alakaseus then hurried to the Kuman camp, from where he was able (under the pretext of being a former loyal servant of the Diogenai family) to persuade Charakenos to travel with him to the small fortress of Poutza, located in the immediate vicinity (*de facto* in sight) southeast of Adrianoupolis.<sup>179</sup> With the help of the local commander, he managed to disarm and kill Charakenos' small Kuman retinue and capture Charakenos himself. After this delicate part of his mission was achieved, he then

<sup>177</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.1. (p. 289); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 46.

<sup>178</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.2. (p. 290–291); Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 157. Alakaseus (Anna Komnene again mentions only his surname) appears in the *Alexiad* for the first and last time in this place. From the context given by the Byzantine princess, almost nothing is known about him, and it seems that he came from a rather modest social situation. Based on the misinterpretation of the *Alexiad*, Skoulatos believes that he was a member of the leading families in Adrianoupolis. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 8. His high origin seems to be unlikely, but he could actually be one of the Adrianoupolis inhabitants (given his familiarity with the immediate surroundings of the city). Four lead seals of individuals named Alakaseus are known from sigillographic findings uncovered in the territory of Bulgaria so far. Apart from the oldest well-known family member who lived at the end of the tenth century and possessed a high court title of *patrikios*, the other two family members with military titles from the eleventh century were of significantly lower status (at the level of commanders of smaller fortresses or troops). See Jordanov, *Corpus* 2, 44–45.

<sup>179</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.2. (p. 291); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 46; Spinei, *Migrations*, 255. The location of this fortress is unknown. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 418. However, as it was later associated with Little Nikaia (today's Havsá, Turkey), it is possible that it was located on a plain in close proximity to Adrianoupolis, that is, between Adrianoupolis and this location. My assumption of a small distance between the fortress of Poutza and Adrianoupolis (no more than 10 km) is based on the text by Anna Komnene. According to her, after his arrival in the Kuman camp, Alakaseus was able to point at the fortress of Poutza visible at some distance and show it to Charakenos. See *Alexias*, X.4.3. (p. 291): “ὄραξ τούτῳ τὸ πολίχνιον καὶ τὴν εὐρείαν ταύτην πεδιάδα...”

managed to smuggle Charakenos to the town of Tzouroulon.<sup>180</sup> Once there, Alakaseus handed the rebel over to the *droungarios tou stolou*, Eustathios Kymineianos,<sup>181</sup> accompanied by a Turk called Kamyres.<sup>182</sup> These two officials were specifically sent by the emperor's mother Anna Dalassene directly from the capital. Being a dangerous insurgent against the imperial power, Charakenos was blinded on the spot, a punishment that marked the end of his active role in the Kuman attack.<sup>183</sup>

However, the abduction of Charakenos did not worry the Kumans at first, as they continued to plunder the wider surroundings of Adrianoupolis.<sup>184</sup> One of the Kuman chieftains was Kitzes, who commanded a large division of nomads with a total strength of 12,000 men.<sup>185</sup> This part of the Kuman host left the siege of the city to the remaining warriors under Tugorkan's command and probably moved southward of Adrianoupolis, to the series of heights with the scattered peasant farms and households called Taurokomos.<sup>186</sup> It seems that Tugorkan himself authorized Kitzes to deploy his men there. The Kumans gathered substantial booty and built a camp. Having received reports about these development, Alexios Komnenos

<sup>180</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.5. (p. 292). The Thracian fortress of Tzouroulon was the scene of intense fighting against the Pechenegs in 1090; see text above.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* Eunuch Eustathios Kymineianos appears in this place for the first time in the text of the *Alexiad*. This is not surprising, as his military career, which began in about 1086 or 1087 with his appointment to a position of fleet commander (*droungarios tou stolou*), was tied with the service in the Byzantine navy and geographically oriented to the shores of Asia Minor. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 85–87; Seibt, *Bleisiegeln*, 228. His presence also indicates that he may have traveled from Constantinople to Tzouroulon by sea, and the need to act quickly was probably the main reason why Kymineianos was entrusted with this delicate task. For his later career see Nicolas Oikonomides, “Ο μέγας δρουγγάριος Ευστάθιος Κυμινειανός καὶ ἡ σφραγίδα του (1099).” *Vyzantina* 13 (1985): 899–907.

<sup>182</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.5. (p. 293). Kamyres, whose sole role in this affair was to blind Charakenos, was very probably of low origin. Therefore, he cannot be identified with the Seljuk commander Kamyres, who led a contingent of 7000 Seljuk Turks sent by Seljuk sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş to help Alexios Komnenos in the fight against the Normans; see text and note 519 in Chap. 4. See Skoulatos, *Personnages*, 158–159; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 148.

<sup>183</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.5. (p. 293); Zonaras, 744; Chalandon, *Essai*, 153; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 47; Frankopan, “Devgenevich,” 158.

<sup>184</sup> Perhaps this also indicates that khan Tugorkan and his subordinate Kuman chieftains had realistically assessed the situation after hearing about Charakenos' imprisonment and decided to reimburse the cost of organizing the entire expedition by gathering as much plunder as possible before returning to their homes.

<sup>185</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.6. (p. 293); Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 160; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 47; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104; Spinei, *Migrations*, 255.

<sup>186</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.6. (p. 293); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 47. Concerning the location of Taurokomos, see note 394 in Chap. 5.



realized that he was presented with the ideal opportunity to inflict significant losses on the Kumans while their forces were divided and, therefore, moved out quickly with the whole army from Anchialos toward Little Nikaia.<sup>187</sup> From there he directed his units to the northwest with the intention of reaching the foot of the ridge on which the Kumans had built their camp and gathered all the spoils. Once the nomads discovered that the Byzantines were approaching, they stormed out of their camp and prepared for combat. A brief battle ensued, at the beginning of which Alexios Komnenos put his mercenary Turkish archers effectively to use. A large section of Turkish *ethnikoi*, probably led by Tatikios, Skaliarios, and Ilkhan,<sup>188</sup> executed the emperor's orders precisely and successfully, thus luring the attacking Kumans into a trap formed by other Byzantine units waiting in close battle formation at the foot of the ridge.<sup>189</sup> In the subsequent engagement, the advantage of the superior protective equipment of heavy Byzantine cavalry soon became apparent.<sup>190</sup> According to the testimony of Anna Komnene, Alexios Komnenos took an active role in the battle when he personally killed one of the leading Kuman warriors.<sup>191</sup> The defeated nomads were routed and tried to save themselves by fleeing from the battlefield, allegedly leaving behind 7000 dead. The victorious Byzantines subsequently seized 3000 captives, as well as all the spoils found in the abandoned Kuman camp. However, as this belonged to the peasants of the surrounding settlements stolen by the looting nomads during the previous days and weeks, Alexios Komnenos did not allow these items to be distributed among his soldiers. Instead, he returned them to their original owners, who, after receiving news of the Byzantine victory, began to gather on the battlefield to claim their belongings.<sup>192</sup>

When the news of the defeat reached Tugorkan, the Kuman khan immediately lifted the siege of Adrianoupolis and, with the remnants of his forces started to retreat north.<sup>193</sup> Fortunately, the Byzantines had a complete overview of the current movements of the Kuman host, so after two days the emperor moved from Little Nikaia with the whole army to the

<sup>187</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.6. (p. 293). Little Nikaia was already mentioned in the context of the war against the Pechenegs in 1087. See text and note 469 in Chap. 5.

<sup>188</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.6. (p. 293); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 77; Spinei, *Migrations*, 255.

<sup>189</sup> See text above.

<sup>190</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.6. (p. 293); Birkenmeier, *Army*, 77–78.

<sup>191</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.7. (p. 293).

<sup>192</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.8. (p. 294); Rasovskij, “Половцы,” 107; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 47.

<sup>193</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294); Spinei, *Migrations*, 255.

already liberated Adrianoupolis.<sup>194</sup> The Kuman khan wanted to avoid being pursued by the Byzantines at all costs, so he sent almost all of his lower-ranking chieftains as emissaries to Adrianoupolis, pretending that he was willing to negotiate a truce. In reality, their role was to cover the retreat of their fellow tribesmen for as long as possible.<sup>195</sup> After three days of fruitless negotiations in Adrianoupolis, Alexios Komnenos finally decided to stop this charade and immediately sent messengers to the Byzantine units that were still guarding the mountain passes, ordering them that they should under no circumstances allow the retreating nomads to escape.<sup>196</sup> Simultaneously, he embarked on their relentless pursuit with all his cavalry units, reaching first Skoutarion,<sup>197</sup> then Agathonike,<sup>198</sup> and finally Abrilebo,<sup>199</sup> where he was at last able to catch up with the retreating Kumans. Luckily for the Byzantines, the nomads were evidently slowed

<sup>194</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.9. (p. 294); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 48.

<sup>195</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.9. (p. 294); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 48. For the defensive but also offensive purposes of similar negotiations initiated not only by the nomads but also by the Byzantines, and other ethnic groups in this period, see Peter B. Golden, “War and Warfare in the pre-Cinggisid Western Steppes of Eurasia,” *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500–1800)*, ed. By Nicola di Cosmo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 154. A similar case occurred on the eve of the Byzantine campaign against Dristra in late summer of 1087, when the Paradounavon Pecheneg leaders initiated diplomatic talks with the Byzantines in order to postpone or entirely avoid hostilities. See text above.

<sup>196</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294); Spinei, *Migrations*, 255.

<sup>197</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294). This location is identified with today’s Bulgarian village of Shtit (formerly Juskjudar), which lies about 23 km northwest of Adrianoupolis near today’s Bulgarian-Turkish border. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 448; Diaconu, *Coumans*, 48.

<sup>198</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294). Agathonike was probably located near the village of Orjakhovo in present-day Bulgaria, about 50 km east of Haskovo. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 168.

<sup>199</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 294). This area has been recently associated with the Bakardzicite Heights on the left bank of the Tundzha river, approximately 80 to 90 km north-northeast of Adrianoupolis and 10 to 25 km east-southeast of Diampolis. Soustal, *Thrakien*, 159–160. When looking at the map, it is clear that the Kumans probably had two main reasons for choosing this route. First, they apparently tried to give the impression that they were heading directly to Beroe and to the passes through the Haimos located in this area (the Shipka Pass, the Republic Pass, and the Tvardishki Pass). This is indicated by the fact that after leaving Agathonike, they moved northeast, crossed the Tundzha river, and tried to disappear from the view of the Byzantine scouts and spies in the hilly and woodland area of Abrilebo. Second, this route also allowed the Kumans to avoid the areas they had plundered on their way to Adrianoupolis. Thus, they could count on gaining more booty and fodder needed for their return to the Black Sea steppes. This is corroborated by the further development of events, because when the Byzantines tracked down the Kumans in the vicinity of Abrilebo and attacked, the fleeing nomads took the shortest possible route directly northward to the Sidera pass, as they were already exposed and hiding was no longer necessary.

down by the great number of spoils.<sup>200</sup> The next day, the Byzantines attacked the Kumans vigorously, who were routed.<sup>201</sup> The fleeing Kumans abandoned all their spoils and, closely pursued by the Byzantine light cavalry units, tried to cross the Sidera pass to the relative security of Paradounavon as quickly as possible.<sup>202</sup> However, before they were able to reach the pass, the main Byzantine forces led by the emperor overtook the Kumans again and inflicted further heavy losses in their ranks. Because of these events, many Kumans found themselves in Byzantine captivity and expanded the numbers of their peers captured a few days earlier at Taurokomos.<sup>203</sup> At this point, Alexios Komnenos wisely decided to bring his triumphant soldiers to a halt, fearing a possible nomad ambush, if he crossed the Haimos with his troops. The next day, he moved with the entire Byzantine army from the Sidera pass to the city of Goloe, where he and his men rested for another day, celebrating victory and distributing trophies and rewards to those soldiers who had excelled during the operations.<sup>204</sup> Then Alexios Komnenos set out on a return journey to the capital, which he reached two days later, in late June or early July 1095.<sup>205</sup>

The victorious emperor could rest, at last. All his dangerous adversaries in the Balkans, whom he had constantly fought since his ascension to the throne in 1081, were definitively crushed, and the Byzantine Balkan

<sup>200</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (pp. 294–295).

<sup>201</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 295).

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104.

<sup>203</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.10. (p. 295); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 48; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 78; Stephenson, *Frontier*, 104; Spinei, *Migrations*, 255.

<sup>204</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.11. (p. 295); Diaconu, *Coumans*, 48.

<sup>205</sup> *Alexias*, X.4.11. (p. 295). The chronology of this campaign is merely hypothetical due to the lack of chronological data in the *Alexiad* (see text above). The Byzantine units marched out against the Kumans sometime after the spring equinox (the timing is similar to during the war against the Pechenegs in 1091), took up defensive positions in the passes and subsequently waited for some time for the Kuman attack. The nomads broke through their defenses relatively rapidly (within a few days) and took Goloe. After several days of camping in the area of Diampolis and Goloe, the Kumans first marched to Anchialos, where they lingered again for at least a week trying to provoke a decisive battle against the Byzantines led by the emperor in person. From there they moved to Adrianoupolis, which, according to Anna Komnene, was under siege for forty-eight full days. Toward the end of this period Charakenos was captured by Alakaseus. Within a week, the Byzantines won a minor skirmish at the Taurokomos ridge, and the Kumans retreated north to the Sidera pass as quickly as possible. In total, the Kuman invasion (or the part of it that took place south of the Haimos mountains) could have lasted for about three months from the end of March, or the beginning of April until the end of June, or the beginning of July 1095, which thus represents a possible date for the return of Alexios Komnenos to Constantinople.

provinces could finally enjoy an unprecedented feeling of security unknown for at least the last fifty years. Several thousand captured Kumans settled around the town of Naissos (today's Niš, Serbia) in the province (*thema*) of Boulgaria, where they, like their distant Pecheneg relatives before them, had to perform military service in the ranks of the Byzantine army and contribute to the protection of the Balkan provinces they had previously invaded.<sup>206</sup> After a brief respite, the time was ripe for the emperor to finally fully focus on the struggle against the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor. As in the previous years, Alexios Komnenos dispatched his envoy to the pope Urban II, asking for help against these enemies of Christianity. He hoped that the pope would send strong cavalry detachments made up of experienced mercenaries. Instead, the First Crusade was declared in November 1095, a massive military operation, which eventually led to the reconquest of large stretches of Asia Minor by the crusaders and the Byzantines, but under entirely different circumstances than those that Alexios Komnenos initially had in mind.

<sup>206</sup> However, specific information on this measure has not been preserved in Byzantine written sources. The settling of the Kumans in the Niš area was proposed by Rasovskij; see Rasovskij, *Половцы*, 107. Moreover, it was precisely in this area where the Kumans (already in Byzantine service) would intervene a little later against the first groups of crusaders of the so-called People's Crusade led by Peter the Hermit. Spinei, *Migrations*, 255; Runciman, *Crusades*, 261.



## Synthesis

From the events described above it becomes evident not only that between 1081 and 1095 the Byzantine army and navy suffered through a long and complicated stage of development, but that, as a result of the often-massive losses incurred during the military conflicts with the enemies of the Byzantine Empire, they also inevitably underwent extensive changes in their structure, many of which ultimately proved to be irreversible. The Byzantine armed forces went through prolonged and multiple trials by fire, at the end of which a new effective Byzantine army and navy was already looming on the horizon, having the lion's share in the creation and preservation of the important power position of Byzantium under the Komnenian dynasty until almost the end of the twelfth century. However, before drawing more precise conclusions about its transformation and the impact of these changes on Alexios Komnenos' capacity regarding the recovery of lost Byzantine territories in Asia Minor, I will briefly summarize the main stages of the development of the Byzantine armed forces between 1081 and 1095 and then focus on the overall assessment of the military capability of their commander during this period—the emperor Alexios Komnenos.

## 7.1 BYZANTINE ARMY AND NAVY IN 1095

### 7.1.1 *Development of the Byzantine Army in 1081–1095*

As there are currently no plausible estimates concerning the overall numerical strength of the Byzantine armed forces around 1095 (i.e., after the end of the military conflicts described above, from the ascension of Alexios Komnenos to the imperial throne to the successful repulsion of the Kuman invasion), it is necessary to take a look back to 1081, when we have a relatively reliable (yet incomplete) overview of a large part of the Byzantine army participating in the war against the Normans, and then from that point on, slowly trace all the important changes forced upon the Byzantine military structures by the gradual development of historical events. Therefore, the most reasonable starting point for my overview is the state of the Byzantine army in the late spring and early summer of 1081, that is, even before Alexios Komnenos confronted the Norman invaders on 18 October 1081 at the battle of Dyrrachion. As shown above, we have very little data on the main contingents of the Byzantine military (*tagmata*) serving before 1071 in the provinces of Asia Minor. Only small fractions of them had remained available to the military high command by 1081, reflecting the extent of territorial losses after the battle of Manzikert. The units specifically mentioned in the Byzantine sources are the *Chōmatēnoi*, the *Athanatoi*, and the Armenian infantry. The operational core of the Byzantine army thus necessarily consisted of units from the western Balkan provinces (the original *esperia pente tagmata* and others), which were of relatively lesser importance prior to 1071. In particular, these were *tagmata* located in the provinces of Makedonia and Thrace, Thessaly, Bulgaria, Dyrrachion (also probably Hellas and partly also Paradounavon), as well as the *tagma* of the *Maniakatoi Latinoi*, the *tagma* of the Paulikians, and the Vardariot Turks. If necessary, the *tagmata* in question could be reinforced by troops garrisoned in Constantinople or in its immediate vicinity, provided that the emperor himself would take part in the military campaign. In 1081, the units stationed in the capital were the *tagmata* of the *Exkoubitai*, the *Bestiaritai* (and apparently even the *Hetaireia* and possibly the *Bigla*), as well as the Varangian guard. It is also possible to include here the diverse mercenary units, whose number is hard to estimate. Specifically, in 1081, there was the *tagma* (or several *tagmata*?) of the Franks (i.e., the Normans), the Alans, and the Germans. Given the

absence of reliable data on the number of all these units, one can only speculate the size of the military force of the entire Byzantine army in 1081, which probably ranged between 40,000 and 50,000 men.<sup>1</sup>

Among this number of soldiers, however, Alexios Komnenos selected only the most battle-worthy, with which he then left the capital to fight the Normans at the end of August 1081. Not considering the detachment of 2000 Turkish warriors (*symmachoi*) provided to the Byzantine emperor by the Seljuk sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş and the Serbian troops of Constantine Bodin (probably of the same size), the overall strength of the Byzantine units taking part in the battle of Dyrrachion amounted to approximately 20,000 men. As a result of the heavy military defeat and the losses of around 25% (i.e., 5000 to 6000 men) in the battle of Dyrrachion

<sup>1</sup>The proposed general overall estimate is based on the above numerical assessment of individual units, with a *tagma* composed of foreign mercenaries typically having between 300 and 500 men (sometimes even more, but certainly no more than 1000 men), whereas a Byzantine *tagma* composed of “domestic” inhabitants in some of the provinces could have 1000 to 3000 men (depending on the size and importance of the province from which they came). Central or Constantinopolitan *basilika tagmata* in turn could have between 500 and 2000 men, with the exception of the Varangian Guard, which is believed to have had more or less the same numerical strength since its establishment in 988, that is, 4000 to 6000 men. See Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 322–326. Given the present state of knowledge, it is almost impossible to provide at least the approximate number of garrisons of large Byzantine cities (Adrianoupolis, Thessalonica, etc.), although their numbers certainly amounted to at least 1000 to 2000 men, as well as of smaller towns and fortresses (*kastra*) scattered close to important strategic points (mountain passes, fords, road intersections, etc.) all over the Byzantine Balkans. It is certainly impossible to approach more accurate estimates of the number of forces, as, for instance, Treadgold did with great erudition in the case of the Byzantine army between the third and eleventh centuries. See Treadgold, *Army*, 43–86. As already noted above, at the turn of the eleventh century, military manuals called *taktika* or *strategika* containing detailed information on the number and composition of the then Byzantine military units disappear from Byzantine written sources, and military researchers dealing with the Byzantine army in the period from the eleventh century to the demise of the Byzantine Empire have far less relevant information at their disposal than researchers examining earlier periods. Treadgold considers the year 1025 a turning point, after which it is very difficult to arrive at coherent and reliable estimates. After that date, in his opinion, a gradual neglect of *themata* ensued, resulting in large fluctuations and reductions in the total strength of the Byzantine army, which he estimates at ca. 250,000 men (plus or minus 20,000) as of 1025. Treadgold, *Army*, 85. This figure is naturally in stark contrast to the proposed total numerical strength of the Byzantine army in 1081 (40,000 to 50,000 men). However, the explanation of the apparent disproportionality of both estimates goes beyond the thematic framework of this work and I will therefore address this issue elsewhere in the future. For an overview of causes of the steep decline in the Byzantine armed forces in the eleventh century, see Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 332.

and in the months thereafter, several units became extinct. The history and tradition of some of them dated back to Late Antiquity, most notably the *Exkoubitai*, who disappeared from the historical sources after the battle of Dyrrachion, which proved to be their ultimate combat engagement.<sup>2</sup> The same fate awaited the *Bestiaritai*.<sup>3</sup> Heavy casualties probably crippled the *tagma* of the province of Dyrrachion (however, not in direct connection with the battle itself, but with the surrender of Dyrrachion to the Normans in February 1082), as well as the Varangian guard. However, this did not mean the complete demise of the Varangians, as only a section of them fought at Dyrrachion. Other *tagmata* suffered only minor or almost no losses. Therefore, the crushing defeat at Dyrrachion, despite its seriousness, did not result in the immediate collapse of the Byzantine army, and Alexios Komnenos still had troops at his disposal to face the Normans the following year.

The main problem affecting the development of the Byzantine army after the defeat at Dyrrachion in October 1081 was the fact that for the first time it was denuded of its top-quality “shock” troops (especially the Varangian guard, which had to recover after the heavy casualties it suffered there), and thus could no longer protect the rest of the units from the attacks of the Norman heavy cavalry. Normally, the Byzantines would respond to such a situation by a short-term increase in the number of mercenaries who excelled in a style of warfare similar to that of the Norman knights. This would lead to intensified recruitment of Norman or Western European knights, who had traditionally represented the “spearhead” of the Byzantine army since the mid-eleventh century in engagements both in the west and in the east of the empire.<sup>4</sup> However, this established practice was now prevented or significantly limited by two factors—first, the fact that the most dangerous enemies of the Byzantine Empire were the Normans from southern Italy themselves, so their recruitment to the ranks of the Byzantine army was impossible, and second, that Alexios Komnenos was faced in late 1081 and early 1082 with a severe lack of funds, which in turn prevented him from hiring knights from other parts of the Latin West. This unfortunate situation resulted in two more defeats at the hands

<sup>2</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 126); Kühn, *Armee*, 103; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 157.

<sup>3</sup> *Alexias*, IV.4.3. (p. 127).

<sup>4</sup> Theotokis, “Mercenaries,” 143ff; Cheynet, “Effectifs,” 334. The Normans represented the elite of the Byzantine army in the period before 1071. The combat value of other troops was assessed by comparison with the Norman military qualities even in the mid-twelfth century. See note 172 in Chap. 6.



of the Normans in the battles of Joannina and Arta, resulting in the extension of the Norman occupation zone in the Balkans by 1082.<sup>5</sup> The Byzantine cities of Thessalonica and Larissa soon found themselves within Bohemund's reach, and if the Normans were to be stopped before advancing toward Constantinople in the following year of 1083, it was necessary to come up with an effective alternative plan.

As mentioned above, Alexios Komnenos, unable at the time to hire knights from the Latin West, came up with another solution. The Byzantine army under his command at the turn of 1083 changed the method of combat and began to closely imitate the style of warfare used by the nomadic peoples of the steppe, namely the Pechenegs, the Uzes, and the Seljuk Turks. It is no coincidence that numerous contingents of Byzantine *ethnikoi*, consisting of Uzes and an auxiliary division of Seljuks repeatedly sent by the sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş, are mentioned in the written sources *sub anno* 1083.<sup>6</sup> This alternative approach allowed the Byzantines to eventually defeat the Normans in a series of encounters near Larissa and oust them from western Makedonia back to Epirus. As soon as the war against the Normans ended in July 1085, the financial situation of the Byzantine Empire began to improve steadily, and the ranks of the Byzantine army were once again significantly reinforced by the Norman mercenaries, or rather by Norman knights and rank-and-file soldiers who did not return to southern Italy after the end of the war in 1085, but preferred to try their luck in the service of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>7</sup> The Byzantine army could then return to its previous paradigm of waging a war. It seemed that the crisis triggered by the overwhelming defeat at Dyrrachion was over and the losses suffered by the Byzantines were more or less replaced. However, even before the final defeat of the Normans, the conflict with

<sup>5</sup> See text above.

<sup>6</sup> Meško, "Influences," 68ff.

<sup>7</sup> Their actual number cannot be determined; there is only an informed guess of several hundred to a maximum of 3000 men. The upper limit of our estimate is based on the similar maximum of Normans available to the rebellious Norman mercenary commander Roussel of Bailleul in 1073–1076. See note 205 in Chap. 2. It is inconceivable that Alexios Komnenos, who successfully suppressed the Roussel of Bailleul's rebellion in 1076 and knew firsthand how dangerous the Normans could be if they were concentrated in similar numbers under a unified command, would take the same risk and create a unit of Norman mercenaries of the comparable size a decade later. Moreover, it is certain that not all the Normans served together under a single commander as was usually the case before 1071, but were rather divided into several *tagmata* under the command of different commanders (not necessarily of Norman origin), whose numbers constantly fluctuated.

the Pechenegs inhabiting the province of Paradounavon between the lower Danube and the Haimos mountains had gradually flared up and forced the Byzantines to fight back with everything they had at their disposal. The restored Byzantine army, in a similar composition as in the battle of Dyrrachion (of course, excluding the units of the *Exkoubitai* and the *Bestiaritai*, and the Seljuk and Serbian allies) and a total force of approximately 15,000 men had to risk a new decisive battle against the Paradounavon Pechenegs at Dristra in August 1087. Once again, however, Alexios Komnenos and his army suffered a severe defeat with heavy losses. Minor skirmishes and battles against the nomads then continued until spring 1091, leading to further losses in manpower and military equipment.

Unfortunately, based on evidence available to us, it is not even possible to estimate the overall casualties suffered by the Byzantine side in terms of numbers. However, it seems certain that the defeat at Dristra hit particularly hard the mainstay units of the Byzantine army—the *tagmata* of Makedonia and Thrace, and Thessaly, which together with the Varangian guard formed the operational core of the Byzantine army in the Balkans during this period. The Varangians suffered serious losses again and, after 1087, there is no mention of them in the descriptions of the battles against the Paradounavon Pechenegs (although the unit was not extinct). During the battle of Dristra one of the recently formed *tagmata* of Norman mercenaries was completely annihilated. We can assume that the level of casualties at Dristra in August 1087 reached no less than 25%. Both human and material losses inflicted by the Paradounavon Pechenegs led to renewal of severe financial troubles, which, as between 1081 and 1083, significantly slowed down the process of restoring the combat capabilities of the Byzantine army. Once again, hiring mercenaries became increasingly difficult, although thanks to Alexios Komnenos' diplomatic skills this problem was sometimes overcome, for example, by inviting a contingent of 500 Flemish knights in 1089/1090. However, the emperor did not deploy this precious unit against the Pechenegs, but instead sent it to Asia Minor where it was entrusted with the defense of the recently reconquered city of Nikomedia and its vicinity from the hands of the Seljuks. Instead of the Makedonian, Thracian, and Thessalian *tagmata*, and the Varangians, which were probably undergoing reorganization, a new light cavalry unit appears in the descriptions of the combat operations taking place between 1088 and 1091 (specifically, *sub anno* 1089)—the *Archontopouloi*. This cavalry unit was created by Alexios Komnenos himself to help alleviate the

immediate crisis triggered by the defeat at the battle of Dristra. However, because this unit was sent to combat too soon after its creation and consisted of inexperienced cavalymen, it suffered heavy losses and disappeared from the written sources (although its participation in the battle of Lebounion cannot be completely ruled out). Further, despite the fact that there is no reference to the unit of the *Maniakatoi Latinoi* since its active involvement in the battle of Kalavrye in 1078, the *tagma* of the *Maniakatoi Latinoi*, that is, another Norman *tagma* serving in the Byzantine army, suprisingly resurfaces in the descriptions of hostilities against the Paradounavon Pechenegs *sub anno* 1090.<sup>8</sup> The Byzantine army continued fighting, but the ongoing difficulty of war coupled with repeated losses did not allow the emperor to reorganize it and render it as effective as it was before his ascension to the throne in 1081, thus leading to inevitable *ad hoc* changes in its composition and continuous reductions in its overall combat capability. Thus, after the defeat at Dristra, as in 1082/1083, there was a strong tendency to imitate the tactics of the nomadic peoples, signaling the increasing importance of light cavalry.<sup>9</sup> Similarly to clashes near Larissa, the ranks of the Byzantine army in 1090 also included a unit of Turkish Uzes (*ethnikoi*). The emperor's shift of attention to the creation of new units under new principles and the severe lack of funding meant that other *tagmata* that existed before 1081 now went extinct (i.e., the *Athanatoi* and perhaps also the *Chōmatēnoi*). It can be assumed that the *tagmata* of the provinces of Boulgaria, Hellas, and Dyrrachion were still in existence, but since they do not seem to have been called into the fighting against the Paradounavon Pechenegs (which was taking place mostly on the territory of the province of Makedonia and Thrace), there are essentially no period references to them, and their continued survival can only be definitively documented on the basis of a still expanding volume of discovered and published sigillographic material.<sup>10</sup> The same seems

<sup>8</sup>See text above. Also Kühn, *Armee*, 258. Their relationship with the aforementioned mercenary Norman *tagmata* is still not satisfactorily clarified. It is also unknown what combat duties this unit had between 1078 and 1090 and where it was deployed during that period. Based on the silence of the written sources describing mainly events in the capital and in the Balkans during the late 1070s and early 1080s it can be assumed that it was stationed somewhere in Byzantine Asia Minor.

<sup>9</sup>This is evidenced by the method of combat of the unit of the *Archontopouloi*. See also Meško, "Influences," 70ff.

<sup>10</sup>However, this topic has not yet been sufficiently examined and I would like to address it in the near future, if possible.

to apply to the unit of the *Hetaireia*.<sup>11</sup> By that time, the Constantinople city guard unit (*Bigla*) had most likely ceased to exist.

After the final defeat of the Pechenegs in the battle of Leboundion at the end of April 1091, which would not have been possible without the help of the Kuman host led by khans Tugorkan and Bōňek, the long overdue era of the systematic reconstruction and reorganization of the Byzantine army could finally begin. Indeed, this process started shortly after the Pecheneg defeat, paradoxically by dissolving the unit of the Paulikians on the grounds of its unreliability back to 1082, when its commanders Xantas and Kouleon refused to comply with the emperor's orders. Some of the losses suffered in the previous period were offset by the creation of the *tagma* from the Pecheneg survivors of the battle of Leboundion (*Patzinakai Moglenitai*) and also the Vlachs (*tagma tōn Blachōn*) recruited just before that battle, who are believed to have become the basis of the Byzantine military presence in the recaptured territory of Paradounavon. As almost a full decade had elapsed since the demise of several units with a long military record and tradition (*Exkoubitai*, *Bestiaritai*), Alexios Komnenos decided not to return to the original organizational structure of the Byzantine army before 1081, but instead to formalize and systematize all the changes introduced after 1081. The basis of the Komnenian army thus became an improvised combination of survivors from the native Balkan *tagmata* (Dyrrachion, Thessaly, Boulgaria, Makedonia and Thrace, Hellas?), the *ethnikoi* of the Uzès and the Pechenegs, soldiers in mercenary *tagmata* recruited from among the nations neighboring the Byzantine Empire in both the East and the West, and, finally, the personal guards of individual members of the supreme Byzantine aristocracy, including the military entourage (or personal guard) of the emperor Alexios Komnenos himself.<sup>12</sup> This is evidenced by the constantly re-emerging names of commanders, whose presence seems always to indicate the presence of a particular unit.<sup>13</sup> All the central *basilika tagmata*, which for centuries had been the most visible element of continuity representing the link between the Byzantine army and its predecessor from Late Antiquity, practically ceased to exist. The baptism by fire of this newly restored field army, whose force is estimated at around 10,000 to 15,000 men (i.e., a state about the

<sup>11</sup>The presence of this unit is evidenced by the fact that several of its commanders are known from sigillographic material from this period. See text above.

<sup>12</sup>See Bartusis, *Army*, 5.

<sup>13</sup>We have mentioned individual examples at relevant points in the text.

same or slightly more than before the lost battle of Dristra in 1087), was the unexpected Kuman invasion in 1095. It eventually succeeded as the Byzantines managed to fend off the Kuman attack, and although this is not specifically mentioned in the contemporary sources, it seems that the overall casualties were not considerable (since Alexios Komnenos avoided direct combat as much as possible and preferred indirect methods consisting mainly of various battle ruses and maneuvers in an attempt to push the Kumans back beyond the lower Danube). The captured Kumans, like the Pechenegs (and the Uzes) before them, were readily incorporated into the ranks of the Byzantine army as *ethnikoi*.

The above overview of the development of the Byzantine army between 1081 and 1095 shows that in 1095 its condition was, from the point of view of numerical strength, worse than in 1081. The original military force of approximately 40,000 to 50,000 men was reduced as a result of significant losses in the battles of Dyrrachion and Dristra by about 14,000 men,<sup>14</sup> whereas the newly created units composed of defeated enemies (mainly the Pechenegs and the Kumans) were far from being able to provide satisfactory compensation for these losses. Thus, by 1095 the total numerical strength of the Byzantine army ranged between 26,000 and 36,000 thousand men.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, paradoxically, it seems that more than a decade of constant warfare and continuous transformations often forced by substantial casualties allowed for the birth of a “new-model” Byzantine army, which, although less numerous in its overall size than its predecessor in 1081, became after 1095 far more effective in defense against the two main adversaries of Byzantium: the Normans (the Pechenegs, the Kumans) in the West and the Seljuks in the East.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, this statement leads to my first conclusion. It is clear that this Komnenian army, due to its reduced numbers and essentially defensive method of warfare, was not suitable for the eventual reconquest of lost territories in Asia Minor after 1071. In order to reorganize his defensive force into an army capable of conducting offensive warfare, Alexios Komnenos first needed to boost its numerical strength so as to reach the pre-1081 level (not to mention the return to the size of the army as it

<sup>14</sup> Assuming that the casualties in the battle of Dristra were at least equal to or slightly higher than those suffered in the battle of Dyrrachion (5000 to 6000 men).

<sup>15</sup> All this provided that there had not been too much reduction in the strength of local garrisons in towns and fortresses (*kastra*) on the territory of the Byzantine Balkans.

<sup>16</sup> See Birkenmeier, *Army*, 82–83.

existed before the battle of Manzikert). However, in 1095, a rapid increase in numbers was only possible by means of the massive hiring of foreign mercenaries, because the gradual restoration of the native Byzantine *tagmata*, given the cost of acquiring and training new recruits, would only be possible over a much longer time span.

### 7.1.2 *Development of the Byzantine Navy in 1081–1095*

Since the Byzantine navy had been much more neglected before 1081 than the army, the entire naval force of the Byzantine Empire in the spring of 1081 represented a maximum of twelve to twenty warships (dromons) concentrated in the imperial squadron (*basilikon dromōnion*) with its base in Constantinople. The post of the commander of the fleet (*droungarios tou stolou/droungarios tōn ploimōn*) had not been occupied since 1074 and remained vacant until Nikeforos III Botaneiates' ascension to the throne in 1078. It was for this very reason that Alexios Komnenos could not send any ships against the Norman fleet in the spring of 1081 and, therefore, could not in any way prevent the Norman host from sailing across the Strait of Otranto. As a result, in the following years, the emperor made multiple efforts to increase the number of warships and send them to help the Venetians, who already in 1081 promptly equipped a strong fleet and successfully attacked the Normans. Fresh crews were being trained as new ships were being built. The first phase of reconstruction was completed in the spring of 1084 when, after the confiscation of captured pirate vessels and their inclusion in the imperial service together with their crews and the construction of several new ships, a core of the new Byzantine fleet was established, amounting to approximately thirty to forty warships at most. Most of them (around thirty) were then sent to fight alongside the Venetians as the auxiliary force against the Normans. The first combat performance of the Byzantines at sea in November of 1084 (the last time the Byzantine fleet had been deployed in combat was in the 1060s) finally turned out to be a nearly complete fiasco. Not only did the Byzantine warships represent the “soft underbelly” of the combined Venetian-Byzantine fleet, but their inexperienced crews, faced with strong and determined Norman attacks, panicked and abandoned their allies. The Normans managed to capture in total seven Byzantine vessels, and an unknown number of other ships were damaged or sunk. The rest of the fleet probably returned to Constantinople and did not intervene in the fighting against the Normans

again until the end of the war in July 1085. Because of such a high level of losses, Alexios Komnenos had to start the restoration of the Byzantine warfleet in 1084 virtually from scratch.<sup>17</sup>

During 1086, most Byzantine warships (approximately twenty) took part in a hit-and-run-style raid in the northern part of the Aegean Sea, aimed at destroying emir Abu'l-Kasim's ships that were being built at a port on the island of Chios. The mission was successful.<sup>18</sup> The following year, a squadron of the Byzantine fleet (three to five ships) set sail on the lower Danube to prevent the Paradounavon Pechenegs, in the context of the large Byzantine counterattack against them, from eventual reinforcement from among the Pecheneg groups living north of the Danube. For the remainder of the war against the Pechenegs lasting until April 1091, the Byzantine fleet did not actively oppose the nomads, as all the fighting against them took place primarily on land. The main adversary of the Byzantine navy at the turn of the 1080s and 1090s became the Seljuk emir Çaka, who, with his ambition to build his own pirate fleet and dominate the west coast of Asia Minor and the adjacent Aegean islands (Çaka gradually conquered the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, and Rhodes),<sup>19</sup> directly threatened Byzantine maritime communication routes in the very heart of the Byzantine Empire. Given the fact that these relatively intense naval battles against Çaka in the northern Aegean go beyond the thematic scope of this book, I will only note here that even though the Byzantine fleet

<sup>17</sup>This may be related to the creation of a new post of the supreme commander of the navy (*megas doux tou stolou*) by the emperor around this time. *Megas doux* was superior to the former navy commander with the title *droungarios tou stolou* (theoretically, however, the years 1084, 1085, and 1086 come into consideration because the exact dating has not yet been determined; see Böhm, *Flota*, 217; Guiland, "Mégaduc," 220). This step was apparently necessary because the post of *droungarios tou stolou*, given the decline of the navy and the loss of the battle-worthy ships, changed from a combat commander leading the warfleet from aboard his flagship to a land-based officer managing and administering the remnants of the navy's assets. Therefore, Alexios Komnenos seems to have kept the administrative nature of this post and preferred to create a new command position with combat responsibilities. A little later, the planning and construction of seaside fortresses, guarding access to major Byzantine navy bases on the newly acquired Asian Minor coast, was added to *droungarios'* administrative duties, further moving him away from command duties at sea. See Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 187. I plan to address this interesting issue in the future.

<sup>18</sup>*Alexias*, VI.10.7. (p. 126); Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 183. However, I did not include this combat operation in the interpretation as it goes beyond the thematic framework of this monograph.

<sup>19</sup>*Alexias*, VII.8.2. (pp. 222–223); Zonaras, 737; Hagenmeyer, *Kreuzzugsbriefe*, 132; Gautier, "Diatribes," 35; Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 184; Pryor and Jeffrey, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 101; Böhm, *Flota*, 145.

suffered significant losses in the initial phase of the hostilities, which took place in 1088 and 1089,<sup>20</sup> it eventually emerged victorious and much stronger after the fighting.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that the confrontation with Çaka, who posed a far greater threat at sea to the Byzantines than the Normans from southern Italy, forced the Byzantine emperor between 1090 and 1091 to proceed to a much faster rate of construction of new ships than in the first phase of shipbuilding between between 1081 and 1084.<sup>22</sup> The successful renewal of the navy's strength also enabled Alexios Komnenos around 1092 to suppress dangerous uprisings in Crete and Cyprus.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, around 1094, there was probably another important event, which further increased the military force and the deterring potential of the navy. After about half a century, the Byzantines managed to resume the production of the so-called Greek or liquid fire (*hygron pyr*). A little later, in 1098, the Pisan sailors would experience this terrible naval weapon themselves in one of the sea battles against the Byzantines off the island of Rhodes, which, however, was already carried out in the context of the First Crusade.<sup>24</sup> The "new" Komnenian navy thus shows a much higher degree of reconstruction compared to the "new" Komnenian army, and in 1095 its force factually increased severalfold to at least 100 warships, compared to its much neglected state in 1081.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, Alexios Komnenos'

<sup>20</sup> However, these losses cannot be quantified, as Anna Komnene describes the Byzantine naval forces as consisting of "enough men and ships to fight the enemy." When this naval force led by Niketas Kastamonites was defeated, Anna Komnene states that "many of the ships which he had put to sea with him were captured by Tzachas." *Alexias*, VII.8.2. (p. 223).

<sup>21</sup> During the fights of 1088 and 1089, Anna Komnene mentions the armament of "another fleet" (these were therefore significant reinforcements, not just individual ships), which complemented the numbers of the navy's main combat force and certainly more than replaced previous losses. *Alexias*, VII.8.3. (p. 223): "ὁ βασιλεὺς [...] ἕτερον ἐξοπλίζει στόλον." However, as in the previous case, it is not yet possible to quantify these general statements of the Byzantine princess more specifically.

<sup>22</sup> Ahrweiler, *Mer*, 183–185.

<sup>23</sup> *Alexias*, IX.3.1. ff (pp. 261–263); Zonaras, 737; Cheynet, *Pouvoirs*, 97–98; Böhm, *Flota*, 149. On this occasion, Anna Komnene describes the fleet as great, although she does not provide any specific numbers. *Alexias*, IX.3.1. (p. 262): "μετὰ στόλου μεγάλου." For dating of this event, see Pryor and Jeffreys, *ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Alexias*, XI.10.3. (p. 351).

<sup>25</sup> This optimistic estimate is based on the fact that the Byzantine navy was clearly so strong in 1092 that it was even able to operate in three areas at the same time: one fleet intervened against the rebels in Crete, the second in Cyprus, and the third in the northern Aegean against Çaka. In all cases, the individual commanders had sufficient forces (at least thirty warships each) to fulfill the tasks entrusted to them by the emperor. As has already been noted several times above, the exact estimate of the numerical strength of the Byzantine navy in the first half of the 1090s has not yet been possible to determine.



maritime policy was extremely successful, and after several decades of complete decline, the Byzantine navy once again became an effective force to be reckoned with. Nevertheless, it never again reached the position of the dominant navy in the Mediterranean, which undoubtedly belonged to the Byzantines during the first third of the eleventh century. During the first half of the reign of Alexios Komnenos this prominent position of power was jointly held by the triad of the maritime city-states of Italy (Venice, Pisa, and Genoa).<sup>26</sup>

## 7.2 ALEXIOS KOMNENOS AS A MILITARY COMMANDER

In view of the fact that Alexios Komnenos personally participated in most of the military encounters of the three major military conflicts in the Balkans between 1081 and 1095, it is necessary to assess his military skills and abilities as a military commander. As mentioned above, Alexios Komnenos ascended to the imperial throne on 1 April 1081 first and foremost due to his matchless reputation of a brilliant, resourceful, and, above all, under all (even adverse) circumstances seemingly invincible general.<sup>27</sup> All his supporters and political allies from the Byzantine aristocratic elites nurtured high hopes of Alexios Komnenos that if he rose to the imperial throne, he would be able to stop the imminent collapse of the territorial integrity of the Byzantine Empire, defend territories still under Byzantine sovereignty, and eventually reconquer those regions that fell victim to the onslaught of various external enemies, especially the Normans and the Seljuk Turks, and, to a lesser extent, the Pechenegs and later the Kumans. Right from the outset of his reign, Alexios Komnenos placed defense of Balkan provinces at the top of his priority list, and only after securing this key area did he intend to move Byzantine troops to Asia Minor. The reason for this rather simple and straightforward strategy was the young emperor's attempt to avoid fighting on two fronts simultaneously, which had almost always been fatal to the Byzantine Empire in the past.

Alexios Komnenos began to prepare intensively for the confrontation with the Normans, but after half a year of strenuous efforts, instead of

<sup>26</sup>The size and importance of the renewed Byzantine navy is similarly assessed by Böhm, who describes it as medium-strength, yet without providing further quantification. Böhm, *Flota*, 154.

<sup>27</sup>Gautier, "Diatribes," 22–25.

victory, the best Byzantine troops under his personal command suffered an overwhelming defeat in the battle of Dyrrachion on 18 October 1081. Most modern researchers agree that the main cause of the Byzantine defeat was the poor cohesion of the Byzantine combat formation on the battlefield,<sup>28</sup> as well as the fact that, at a key moment of the battle, Alexios Komnenos lost control of the most important part of his army—the Varangian guard.<sup>29</sup> While it is true that Alexios Komnenos did not have much influence on the cohesion of the troops that he actually “inherited” from his predecessors given his short time on the throne, his alleged failure to control the Varangians represents a more serious accusation, which surely deserves more attention. However, it should be remembered that, in the context of the medieval field battle, the loss of control of one’s own troops was not that uncommon and could very easily happen to even the most talented and capable commander. Therefore, in my view, this does not constitute a plausible criterion for judging the quality of any military commander. However, in this context, a different and all the more important question arises: Why did Alexios Komnenos finally opt for a direct confrontation with the Norman host in a classic field battle, instead of blocking the Normans in Epirus from afar by obstructing mountain passes on land and using the Venetian fleet at sea?

The comments of modern historians give the impression that the emperor’s fateful decision to attack the Normans head-on was the result of his youthful inexperience,<sup>30</sup> mostly because they imply that Guiscard’s Norman host was not only better armed, equipped, trained, and experienced, but even enjoyed the advantage of numerical superiority.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Byzantine troops were disorganized and unreliable as a result of the

<sup>28</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Bünemann, *Guiscard*, 126–127; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 157. This criticism is based on the period Byzantine criterion of a capable and battle-worthy military force, which consisted in the disciplined maintenance of the combat formation (*eutaxia*). For this, see Dennis, “Byzantines,” 169.

<sup>29</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 135; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 63; Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 161.

<sup>30</sup> Angold’s claim, although made in the context of Alexios Komnenos’ next defeat in the battle of Dristra, stating that the emperor’s imprudence marked his early years on the Byzantine throne, gives a similar negative impression and in retrospect can also be applied to the battle of Dyrrachion. Angold, *Empire*, 132.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Haldon, *Wars*, 134. This traditional perception of the power ratio in the battle of Dyrrachion is based on the text of the *Alexiad*, where Anna Komnene claims that the size of the Norman army was 30,000 men strong. *Alexias*, I.16.1. (p. 51).

previous decade of civil war,<sup>32</sup> composed of disloyal mercenaries of foreign ethnic origin and low-motivated native Byzantine units, and it was a cardinal mistake to expose them so recklessly to the devastating attack by the Norman knights.<sup>33</sup> However, as noted above, these arguments are not actually valid; on the basis of the most recent estimates, it can be concluded that it was the Byzantine army that by a large margin outnumbered the Normans (a total of 18,000 to 20,000 thousand men). In addition to the elite guard *tagmata* from Constantinople, the nucleus of the Byzantine army was also formed by the Western *tagmata* from the Balkans, which were the least affected units by the crisis development in the post-Manzikert period. The Norman host amounted to about 15,000 men, of whom only 1300 belonged to the battle-hardened Norman knights. The rest of the troops consisted of peasant recruits from the whole Mezzogiorno, militias from Salerno, mercenaries and other knights from all over Western Europe, and even sailors from sunken vessels of the Norman fleet pressed into combat. So, above all, the battle-worthiness and reliability of newly recruited peasants from Apulia and Calabria, as well as sailors who certainly had almost no or very little experience in fighting on land (and yet represented a relatively large part of the Norman host), were very low. Also, the loyalty and willingness of some Norman commanders to observe Guiscard's orders was certainly not unconditional, such as was the case of the above-mentioned militias from Salerno, who obeyed only Guiscard's wife Sikelgaita, or the ranks of the armed entourage of Count Amicus II of Molfetta loyal to him alone and not to Guiscard.

Alexios Komnenos was probably informed about most of these facts because, in line with the recommendations of Byzantine military manuals, he regularly used the services of spies and scouts.<sup>34</sup> While this assumption is not explicitly mentioned by Anna Komnene in relation to the hostilities in Epirus, it is evidenced by the extremely cautious way in which Alexios Komnenos led his army in the days prior to the battle of Dyrrachion. Moreover, all this time, the emperor was evidently aware of the exact location of the Norman camp (e.g., he sent messengers to Guiscard, which would be difficult if uninformed of the location of the duke's encampment). Robert Guiscard also had to send his spies to find out the position

<sup>32</sup> Dawson and McBride, *Infantryman*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Heath and McBride, *Armies*, 30; Birkenmeier, *Army*, 57.

<sup>34</sup> See text above, as well as, for example, Buckler, *Comnena*, 390–391. For the opposite view, see Theotokis, *Campaigns*, 154–155.

of the Byzantines as soon as possible. Exactly such precise and several-days-long maneuvers, as well as the thorough search for the best possible starting position for the decisive attack, taking into account the features of the local terrain, are obvious signs that Alexios Komnenos' decision to fight the Normans under the walls of Dyrrachion was neither hasty nor ill conceived. On the contrary, the young emperor proceeded with the utmost caution, trying to deploy his units in the most advantageous position possible in order to maximize his chances of success. Apparently, he also designed his own battle plan in detail, which he tried to put into practice on 18 October 1081.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, as mentioned above, Alexios Komnenos could not only be guided by purely military considerations in the case of the Norman attack, but had to act primarily with regard to his own political position, which was far from being stable and secure. He had become the emperor only recently, and all his subjects, given his reputation of an invincible general, expected him to deal with the Norman threat in a decisive manner and, above all, as quickly as possible. Thus, the blocking of the Normans in Epirus leading to their gradual starvation, which seemed the most appropriate solution in the situation from a purely military point of view, was impossible to apply. Moreover, there was a very real risk that Dyrrachion defenders would not be able to resist Guiscard's onslaught long enough, and the fall of this very, if not the most, important Byzantine stronghold in Epirus would greatly damage the overall prestige of the Byzantine Empire. In addition, the emperor's long absence from Constantinople could possibly give rise to another major peril for Alexios Komnenos' recently acquired imperial position, specifically the substantial threat of a new attempt to usurp the Byzantine throne. It was for all these reasons that Alexios Komnenos finally opted for the calculated risk of a field battle. Unfortunately, in spite of his careful planning and execution of these plans, the tide eventually turned in favor of the Normans.

In consideration of the critical assessment of Alexios Komnenos' alleged underestimation of the Norman heavy cavalry attack,<sup>36</sup> it is also necessary to set some facts straight. In defense of the emperor, it should be noted that although Alexios Komnenos was able to become acquainted to some extent with the Norman heavy cavalry and its fighting pattern in the early days of

<sup>35</sup> Generally, Alexios Komnenos acted in accordance with the recommendations of the Byzantine general Kekaumenos. See Kekaumenos, 55.

<sup>36</sup> See note 30 above. See also Haldon, *Wars*, 137.

his military career, this experience was only very limited and, in fact, he had not never before faced the Normans in combat in a classic field battle.<sup>37</sup> In 1073, for example, when then 16-year-old Alexios Komnenos, along with his older brother Isaakios, took part in the campaign against the Seljuks, the Norman troops led by Roussel of Bailleul left the Byzantine military ranks before the crucial meeting with the Seljuks near Kaisareia. Similarly, during 1075 and 1076, when Alexios Komnenos was ordered to suppress the uprising of Rousell of Bailleul, the modest size of his army and poor level of training of his troops forced him to avoid open combat against the Normans, but instead ambush them, whenever possible. However, it is true that in 1078, during the battle of Kalavrye, Alexios Komnenos commanded a unit of the Frankish (Norman) cavalry from southern Italy, and the Norman knights also fought in the ranks of the opposing army of Nikeforos Bryennios (*Maniakatoi Latinoi*).<sup>38</sup> Yet, the description of the battle clearly suggests that Alexios Komnenos deployed these small units in a purely defensive way. Nevertheless, Alexios Komnenos did not have any Norman mercenaries available at Dyrrachion, so his three-year-old experience from the battle of Kalavrye paradoxically could not be implemented. Instead, he tried to protect the front of his battle formation with the shield wall erected by the Varangians, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of which against the Norman cavalry charge he had no means to assess. This fact, in turn, probably prevented him from anticipating the true impact of the Norman cavalry attack during the battle itself. However, even in this case, the breakdown of the Byzantine line-up was facilitated more by the lack of discipline among the Varangians than by Alexios Komnenos' presumed inexperience in military tactics. Besides, the Varangian shield wall proved to be perfectly successful against the Normans at Dyrrachion (as was the case in the famous battle of Hastings in 1066) during the initial phase of the battle, which probably points to the correctness of the military judgment of the Byzantine emperor, who placed the Varangians in the front line of the Byzantine battle formation. The decisive turning point in the battle occurred only when

<sup>37</sup> For examples of other medieval kings and emperors of the eleventh and twelfth centuries who were defeated in the battle due to lack of experience, but otherwise tend to be considered capable commanders, see France, *Warfare*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Bryennios, 265; Tobias, "Tactics," 198; Haldon, *Wars*, 128.

the Varangians imprudently abandoned their positions, as they were probably enticed by the prospect of a pursuit of the routed Norman soldiers, whom they hated so much.

Another equally significant military disaster struck the Byzantine army, again under Alexios Komnenos' command, during the war against the Pechenegs settled in the province of Paradounavon, specifically in the battle of Dristra, which took place at the end of August 1087. As mentioned above, it is likely that the Byzantine army suffered even higher casualties at Dristra than at Dyrrachion. Particularly high losses seem to have been incurred mainly by the Byzantine cavalry units, as the Byzantines felt an acute shortage of cavalymen and suitable mounts in the following years. This lack of battle-worthy cavalry units facilitated the Pecheneg inroads to Byzantine territories south of the Haimos mountains, and the nomads were able to penetrate into Makedonia and Thrace virtually unopposed. This second major failure is certainly more difficult to understand than the defeat at Dyrrachion against the Normans, given that Alexios Komnenos was thoroughly familiar with the nomadic warfare right from the beginning of his military career (certainly to a much greater extent than with the method of combat of the Norman knights). Therefore, he should have been able to anticipate the Pecheneg tactics to a much greater degree and avoid any military encounter with them when circumstances favored his nomadic adversaries. However, the following questions arise: Why did Alexios Komnenos decide to confront the Pechenegs directly and could this decision be the cause of his defeat at the battle of Dristra? How much did Alexios Komnenos, as the supreme commander of the campaign, contribute to its failure?

The answer to these questions again partially lies in the fact that, as in the battle at Dyrrachion, in 1087 Alexios Komnenos' motives to act were also primarily political. In fact, the Pechenegs posed a threat that had gradually materialized in the Byzantine Balkans since the reign of the emperor Constantine VIII (1025–1028). In 1072, these nomads, forming a very large ethnically mixed population in the province of Paradounavon (*mixobarbaroi*) became independent and their chief Tatu replaced the Byzantine officer/military commander in Dristra (*stratēgos*) and ruled there as *exarchōn*.<sup>39</sup> Initially, the coexistence of the emerging *Patzinakia* with the Byzantines was peaceful, but continuous Pecheneg raids soon began to plague the neighboring Byzantine provinces of Makedonia and

<sup>39</sup> Attaleiates, 205; Meško, "Groups," 190.

Thrace. After the truce of 1080, these inroads ceased for a time, but as described above, they were resumed in early 1083. With the Traulos uprising a year later, these attacks were given an even stronger impetus. However, while the war against the Normans was still under way, the Byzantines were forced to tolerate Pecheneg raids, as there were not enough military forces to face the Normans and the Pechenegs simultaneously. Therefore, Alexios Komnenos resorted to diplomatic means to at least mitigate the consequences of these raids. Since the spring of 1086, after the Byzantine units were finally released from the fight against the Normans and the Byzantine response became more aggressive. The first real military success was achieved only in the spring of 1087, when Byzantium was able to fend off the major nomadic invasion led by the Pecheneg chief Çelgü. And it was under the impression of this victory that the idea could have prevailed among the higher Byzantine nobility that the time had come to settle the score with the Paradounavon Pechenegs, once and for all. Alexios Komnenos not only adopted this view in the end, but also wanted to be known as its true originator. Consequently, he initiated extensive military preparations, which, in terms of their scale and systematic approach, were fully comparable to those undertaken before the war against the Normans.<sup>40</sup>

As in the case of the campaign against the Normans, it is clear that the main mistake committed by Alexios Komnenos in the campaign against the Pechenegs was not its military execution. Once again, efforts to organize and carry out the expedition in accordance with the principles of the Byzantine military manuals are clearly discernible. Nor can its failure be attributed to the eventual inexperience on the part of the Byzantine troops that participated in it, because all the troops very responsibly followed the orders of the emperor and his subordinate commanders and, to a certain point, maintained strict discipline during the battle of Dristra, even to a much greater extent than at Dyrrachion. Their fighting spirit was broken only by the arrival of seemingly inexhaustible Pecheneg reinforcements. Ultimately, the real cause of the crushing defeat at the battle of Dristra in 1087 was a flawed strategic estimate based on the aforementioned political reasons. The Byzantines and Alexios Komnenos believed that the defeat of Çelgü's Pechenegs in the spring of 1087 caused confusion among their

<sup>40</sup> See text above.

relatives in Paradounavon, which weakened them, although they were apparently not directly involved in the attack. The Pechenegs seemed to be isolated in the Byzantine territory and the military forces of the Byzantine Empire were thought to be sufficient to ultimately eliminate them and restore the province of Paradounavon under Byzantine control. And it was this estimation of the balance of power that was ultimately erroneous, as the Pechenegs still outnumbered the Byzantine army (approximately 15,000 men). It also appears that even the Byzantine scouts and spies had not been able to operate in the Pecheneg territory with their usual efficiency. Until the last minute, Alexios Komnenos clearly did not know how large the enemy forces would be. He was also unpleasantly surprised by the arrival of numerous Pecheneg reinforcements (36,000 warriors according to Anna Komnene). Ultimately, this cost him victory in the battle. The rank-and-file soldiers could not bear the shock of the arrival of a new mass of enemies and, despite Alexios Komnenos' admirable personal courage in the face of unfavorable circumstances on the battlefield, they preferred to save their lives in flight (and the emperor was forced to follow suit).

Another sign of the excellence of a commander is his ability to adapt to a rapidly changing situation on the battlefield and, in particular, the ability to learn from his own mistakes and modify his own approach to future military challenges. A commander with little or average talent stubbornly repeats the same tactics, resulting in recurring losses. In military history, we can find many examples of a similar approach, for example French or British generals on the battlefields of the First World War (the infamous "donkeys leading lions"). Alexios Komnenos lost two very important battles in the first decade of his reign. First, in the battle of Dyrrachion, he probably underestimated the effect of the concentrated attack of the Norman heavy cavalry, and second, he apparently started the battle of Dristra without prior reliable knowledge of the size of the Pecheneg armed forces. Did these losses trigger Alexios Komnenos' efforts to modify his military strategy? Do the historical sources show us a trajectory of concrete measures taken by the emperor to remedy and then gradually improve the situation?

In the case of repulsing the Norman cavalry attack, it can be concluded with certainty that Alexios Komnenos, immediately after the defeat at Dyrrachion, began to look for new ways to deal with it. Finally, the young emperor gained personal experience of this method of fighting, which, as we saw above, he could not have acquired until then. His first step was to



seek adequate replacement for the shield wall of the Varangian guard protecting the front of the Byzantine fighting formation, which had to be completely withdrawn from the fighting after heavy losses near Dyrrachion for some time (until 1087) in order to reorganize and replenish its thinned ranks. In the battle of Joannina in the spring of 1082, Alexios Komnenos tried to block the Norman mounted troops with light wooden wagons (each with four spears attached with spikes toward the enemy) to thwart their frontal attack on the Byzantine formation. But Bohemund, who commanded the Normans, took advantage of the mobility of his knights and attacked the wings of the Byzantine army and simply bypassed the wall of wooden wagons. In the next encounter at Arta (if it really took place at all), Alexios Komnenos rejected the wooden wagons altogether, and preferred to widely deploy three-spiked iron caltrops (*triboloi*) in front of the Byzantine line. However, Bohemund somehow sensed another trap (or was informed about it by spies or by Byzantine defectors) and yet again struck with his knights the flanks of the Byzantine battle formation. After these serious setbacks, Alexios Komnenos gave up on the idea of confronting the Normans in a classic field battle and avoided any further direct encounters in which the Normans could apply their successful tactics. Meanwhile, he initiated a change in the style of combat of weakened Byzantine troops. Put simply, since the Byzantines could not cope with the Normans in their own style of fighting, Alexios Komnenos concluded that he could eventually defeat the Normans by adopting military tactics of nomadic peoples, such as the Seljuk Turks, with which he was personally very familiar. However, the only but significant disadvantage of this transformation was the fact that the emperor did not have enough time for the Byzantine mounted troops to learn the ways of nomadic warfare (especially the handling of bows and arrows from horseback). Therefore, Alexios Komnenos levied as many nomads as possible (mainly the Uzes)<sup>41</sup> and, in addition, requested new reinforcements in the form of allied troops with a force of 7000 men from the Seljuk sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş. With this army using new strategy in April 1083, in a series of smaller battles and skirmishes at the city of Larissa, he finally managed to stop the

<sup>41</sup> This appears to have happened for the first time since the not-so-successful participation of the *ethnikoi* from among the Uzes in the battle of Manzikert, where a large part of them, along with their commander named Tamin, defected to the Seljuks. Skylitzes, *Synechia*, 147; Haldon, *Wars*, 176. For the Turkish commander's name (Tamin, Tamis), see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica* II, 297. This also points to relative despair on the part of the Byzantine emperor, who was forced by circumstances to use unreliable units.

Normans and forced them to retreat. The repeatedly deceived and outmaneuvered Bohemund, unable to pin down and engage the mobile Byzantine and Turkish archers responding to any of his attempts to attack with heavy volleys of arrows, eventually had to retreat and admit defeat.

When we look in a similar way at the possible causes contributing to the Byzantine defeat at Dristra in 1087, the *Alexiad* does not show much of an effort to remedy the emperor's failure. While the Byzantine princess describes the entire expedition in a fairly detailed way, not even once does she directly or indirectly mention the guides, scouts, and spies who accompanied the Byzantine army. Entirely different situation is described in 1095, when Alexios Komnenos was constantly kept informed about the movements of his Kuman adversaries. As mentioned above, Alexios Komnenos had certainly systematically used the services of scouts and spies, even before he took the throne. This fact leads to the assumption that the cause of Alexios Komnenos' "blind eye" during the expedition against Dristra was not so much the neglect of the necessary reconnaissance on his part, but another unknown reason that prevented the emperor from obtaining vital information about the composition and size of the Pecheneg host before the battle. It can also be assumed that these circumstances were probably beyond the emperor's control. Anna Komnene repeatedly notes that after passing the Sidera pass and entering the land of the former province of Paradounavon, the advancing Byzantine army was constantly being attacked by small Pecheneg groups. These sudden ambushes also continued while the Byzantines rested in the camp and resulted to the deaths of those soldiers who were tasked with obtaining feed for horses and other draught animals (oxen, mules, etc.). As a result, it is very likely that in the same manner, Byzantine scouts and spies were unable to carry out their activities as they were also systematically attacked and pursued. It was for this very reason that the whole army marching toward Dristra was essentially blind, which led to the fateful encounter with the far greater Pecheneg host. It is apparent from the facts just established that Alexios Komnenos' allegedly erroneous conduct was not, in fact, the result of his personal error or failure, but perhaps the consequence of objective reasons, and it must be considered as an exception in his long and rich military career. This is evidenced immediately by his aforementioned acts during the defensive battles against the Kumans in 1095, where a similar failure did not occur and the Byzantine emperor had an almost perfect overview of the Kuman movements and intentions.

On the basis of the above arguments, it can be concluded that Alexios Komnenos was indeed an undeniably talented and excellent military commander. From the beginning of his military career, he displayed high degree of personal bravery in hand-to-hand combat, readily understood the current tactical situation on the battlefield, and had a broad strategic mindset, complemented by a willingness to use various tricks and ploys, thanks to which he soon surpassed all his peers and many senior commanders.<sup>42</sup> With a few exceptions discussed above, he was mostly able to achieve victory with such forces as he had each time under his command. Between 1081 and 1095, he practically ruled “from the saddle” and from there he led his troops in a large number of encounters. A tangible result of his unrelenting efforts to secure the defense of Byzantine territory, which we have followed closely from his ascension to the imperial throne in 1081 until around 1095, was the gradual cessation of hostilities in the Byzantine Balkans and the restoration of peace. Although the Byzantine army more often than not suffered heavy losses under his command, Alexios Komnenos eventually prevented its complete disintegration and became the architect of its new and more battle-worthy reincarnation.

There are many examples of outstanding military commanders in human history who are still considered military geniuses, even though they lost important battles in the course of their spectacular military careers (e.g., Hannibal, Attila, Belisarios, Herakleios, Napoleon, or Erwin Rommel). Therefore, the defeats in the battles of Dyrachion (1081) and Dristra (1087) do not constitute a reliable indicator of Alexios Komnenos’ competence or incompetence as a military commander. Rather, these losses prove that even Alexios Komnenos, as talented a commander that he was, was simply a product of his historic era. Another fact of paramount importance should be emphasized here: the military career of this Byzantine emperor started to develop during the period of significant decline of the Byzantine military force. The last truly Byzantine army was gathered in the summer of 1071, only to be defeated at Manzikert. After that began its rapid disintegration, which was greatly accelerated by the subsequent civil war, the gradual loss of control of large territories in Asia Minor, and finally the rebellions of individual Byzantine generals in Asia

<sup>42</sup> As a result, Leonora Neville, based on a literary analysis of the descriptions of Alexios Komnenos’ military achievements in the work of Nikeforos Bryennios the younger *Hylé historias*, openly notes that Alexios Komnenos had already, before taking the throne, *de facto* fought as the Turk, meaning as the nomad. Neville, *Heroes*, 102.

Minor against the rule of the emperor Michael VII Doukas and his protégé, the all-powerful eunuch Nikeforitzes in Constantinople. For this reason, Alexios Komnenos (and indeed any of his Byzantine aristocracy peers thinking of a career in the army) could not have possibly obtained any experience of commanding large armies in battle. In fact, the much more experienced Romanos IV Diogenes had some difficulty handling his army of approximately 40,000 men during his last campaign in the summer of 1071, culminating in the battle of Manzikert. By comparison, when Alexios Komnenos was ordered to suppress the uprising of Roussel of Bailleul in 1075, he received just a handful of soldiers, and then when he was ordered to confront another insurgent, Nikeforos Bryennios, the troops under his command amounted to approximately 5500 to 6500 men (compared to about 12,000 on the rebel's side).<sup>43</sup> Therefore, before the first major test of his military capabilities—the battle of Dyrrachion—Alexios Komnenos had never actually commanded a large field army, nor did he have any opportunity to obtain such a vital experience. For the first time in his life, Alexios Komnenos led more than 20,000 men into combat in October 1081 to face Guiscard's Normans at Dyrrachion (who, compared to Alexios Komnenos, had this kind of experience thanks to his rich and long military career). For the second time in his life, Alexios Komnenos led a slightly smaller army of 15,000 men again in the battle of Dristra in August 1087. The emperor did not have the necessary experience in leading large armies in 1081 or 1087, although he excelled in fighting smaller military forces. By contrast, in 1091, in the battle of Lebounion, he was able to do away with his inexperience, resulting in the defeat of the Pechenegs (albeit with the significant contribution of his Kuman allies). In a similarly masterful way, he acted in 1095 when he fended off a major Kuman invasion. Inexperience in leading large military formations in combat conditions also certainly contributed to the fact that, Alexios Komnenos undoubtedly suffered devastating defeats at Dyrrachion against the Normans and at Dristra against the Pechenegs. Effective command of large military formations in combat conditions requires solid and long-term service acquired by military experience, which even exceptional talent combined with excellent theoretical knowledge cannot fully replace. However, this experience of the commanding general must be fully supported by a well-trained and well-functioning army, where the individual components are led by capable and motivated commanders. This is still

<sup>43</sup> Haldon, *Wars*, 183.

the case even in our modern era, and this was true to an even greater extent in the Middle Ages. From the above, it can be assumed that the Byzantine army in 1081 (and also in 1087) still lacked these key qualities which it only began to acquire gradually after 1091. Still, despite his several apparent and undeniable failures on the battlefield, Alexios Komnenos should be considered as one of the best commanders in the long history of the Byzantine Empire.



## Conclusion

Based on the descriptions and analyses attempted above, it can be concluded that Alexios Komnenos should be regarded as one of the most capable military commanders in Byzantine history and that, after his ascension in 1081, he prevented the further disintegration of the Byzantine Empire. In this respect, I fully share the view of those Byzantinists who consider Alexios Komnenos the savior of the Byzantine state. Alexios Komnenos was able to rectify in many aspects the consequences of the mistakes of his predecessors and enabled Byzantium to enter a period of revival, which we now rightly call the Komnenian period. When Alexios Komnenos won the throne in early April 1081, his position was very uncertain, and even in such a chaotic situation he was forced to make decisions with far-reaching consequences. If anyone else were in his place, circumstances would force him to do the same and he would certainly not be in a position to remedy the critical condition, so to speak, overnight. Virtually no decision by Alexios Komnenos meant a tilt toward a good or bad solution; very often it was a proverbial choice between two evils, as the young emperor's decision-making in the first weeks of his reign clearly shows. He was unable to avoid armed conflict and was left wondering which enemy to march against first—the Seljuks or the Normans. Here, it must be added (as it is often forgotten) that it was Guiscard who actually made the decision for Alexios Komnenos, as the Norman duke would

attack the Byzantine Empire in any case, regardless of how the young Byzantine emperor would eventually decide. Moreover, the Norman attack was already in full swing even before Alexios Komnenos actually took the imperial throne. The coup in Constantinople in April 1081 did not reduce Guiscard's determination to fully implement his offensive plans against the Byzantine Empire, but rather intensified it. However, none of this could be Alexios Komnenos' fault.

This leads us to the second and no less serious allegation from the lips of some historians, who directly and indirectly accuse Alexios Komnenos of being responsible for the loss of territories in Asia Minor. This might seem so because, as shown above, in the spring of 1081, vast territories in the east still nominally belonged under Byzantine sovereignty. The most significant example is the Syrian metropolis of Antioch with its surroundings. Indeed, it is true that these territories then gradually fell to the Seljuks during the 1080s, leaving only the narrowest Asian outskirts of the Byzantine capital and some coastal areas in western Asia Minor under Byzantine control by 1095. At the same time, however, the defense of these territories was for two reasons impossible by 1081. First, apart from the two units of the *Chōmatēnoi* and the *Athanatoi* recruited from among the residents of Byzantine Asia Minor, there were no longer any domestic Anatolian *tagmata* in the Byzantine army which used to form the main backbone of the Byzantine army in the past. Their organizational framework and supporting infrastructure fell apart even before Alexios Komnenos won the throne, and therefore the responsibility for this situation clearly falls on the heads of his immediate predecessors, namely incapable Michael VII Doukas. It is clear that without eastern *tagmata*, it was not possible to defend the Anatolian provinces (or what was still left of them in 1081). Second, the military force of the western half of the Byzantine Empire, that is, the western *tagmata*, survived the crisis in the army following the battle of Manzikert, but were weakened during the intense military struggle for the imperial throne between 1077 and 1081. In addition, they were needed to defend their home areas. This situation was further complicated by the Norman danger, which in the spring of 1081 grew into a full-fledged invasion, as well as the threat of the Pecheneg raids from the territory of the former Byzantine province of Paradounavon, which "became independent" only in 1072. Alexios Komnenos ascended the throne at the moment of this great weakening of the Byzantine state and simply did not have sufficient military forces at his disposal to ensure

the protection of the Balkans against the Normans and the Pechenegs, as well as the various isolated enclaves in Asia Minor that still at least nominally recognized Byzantine sovereignty. Moreover, many of these territories no longer had any direct land connection to Constantinople during this period, and it was only possible to reach them by an indirect route by sea, which rendered the deployment of troops from the capital all the more difficult (if not outright impossible), not to speak of the poor state of the neglected Byzantine navy which essentially excluded the maritime transfer of reinforcements. In this regard, Anna Komnene's testimony about the run-down army in 1081 is true, though in many individual cases largely exaggerated.

In view of these developments, the question as to whether Alexios Komnenos could, at least in theory, start regaining territories in Asia Minor before 1095, should be answered. It needs to be first considered if, between 1081 and 1095, the emperor really had time to assemble troops in Constantinople (leaving aside the question of what kind of troops for now) and then move against the Seljuks, for example, toward Nikaia, which later became a target and the first stop of the Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land. Also, let us leave the foreign policy constellation aside for the time being (i.e., whether a similar attack would indeed be possible in a given strategic situation). Alexios Komnenos spent almost the entire second half of 1081 outside Constantinople, as he had left the capital to fight the Normans in early August 1081 and apparently returned in late December 1081 or early January 1082. He spent the first months of 1082 making up for losses in the army and fundraising through the expropriation of church liturgical utensils. Similarly, in 1082, the emperor participated in the campaign against the Normans from May until at least August. He devoted the rest of 1082 to organizing a new wave of seizure of the church liturgical utensils and reorganization of military forces, which suffered further losses in the combat against the Normans. News of Bohemund's advance to Larissa forced the Byzantine emperor to set out at the head of the army as early as the turn of February and March 1083 and only return to the capital on the eve of the birth of his first-born child Anna, that is, on 1 December 1083. At the turn of 1083/1084, the emperor had to defend his emergency financial measures from previous years (expropriation of church property) at a special synod. However, as the fighting against the Normans transferred from the land to the sea in 1084, Alexios Komnenos could spend a full year in the capital for the first



time since taking the throne (and actually stayed there until the spring of 1087). But when the Traulos' rebellion erupted, Alexios Komnenos tried in vain to suppress it with an intense diplomatic effort culminating in his known golden bull (*chrysoboullas logos*) promising amnesty to the insurgents from December 1084. At the same time, the emperor presided over a church tribunal that condemned Neilos' heretic teachings. In addition, throughout this period, the emperor was constantly busy with the reorganization of the ground troops. Although Alexios Komnenos did not have to move against the Normans in 1085, Traulos sought an alliance with the Pechenegs from the province of Paradounavon, resulting in raids directed against the Philipoupolis area. The same situation continued during 1086, when the emperor sent two armies against the Pechenegs with variable success, but he himself stayed in Constantinople where he apparently focused his efforts on the reconstruction of the Byzantine navy. In the spring of 1087, a surprising great Pecheneg invasion took place and, after it was repulsed by his generals at the turn of May and June 1087, Alexios Komnenos left Constantinople to finally get personally involved in the fighting. The result was the major defeat of the Byzantines at Dristra. Because of the critical situation caused by the defeat, the emperor could not return to the capital until early December 1087. Over the following years from 1088 to 1090, the chronology of events is somewhat uncertain, but it seems that the emperor always set off in the spring to fight the Pechenegs and returned to Constantinople in late autumn. In 1090, his return could not occur until December. However, as early as mid-February 1091, he had to leave with a small detachment against the marauding Pechenegs threatening the town of Choirobakchoi, and then again with the entire army in mid-April 1091 to the port of Ainos. After achieving the final victory over the Pechenegs at Lebounion, the emperor returned triumphantly to Constantinople in May 1091, where he remained until the turn of spring and summer 1093, when he had to leave anew at the head of an expedition against the Serbs. The emperor spent time between these two dates reorganizing state finances and modifying the order of the imperial succession, and from the imperial palace watched with concern the naval battles against Çaka in the northern Aegean, which concluded in the second half of 1092. In the spring of 1094, Alexios Komnenos had to set off for a second expedition against the Serbs, from which he returned to the capital in the autumn of the same year. At the turn of 1094/1095, the emperor presided over the Synod in Blachernae and the news of Charakenos' defection to the Kumans reached him sometime in early

1095. Because of this, he had to leave the capital in early April 1095 and could return there as a victor over the Kumans only around July 1095.<sup>1</sup>

This detailed chronology of Alexios Komnenos' stay in and outside Constantinople between 1081 and 1095 clearly shows that the longest time the emperor was able to spend continuously without any interruptions in the imperial palace was from 1 December 1083 until the turn of May and June 1087 (three and a half years) and then from May 1091 until late spring 1093 (slightly more than two years). The rest of his early reign was almost completely filled by his personal participation in military campaigns, first against the Normans and then against the Pechenegs, Serbs, and Kumans, usually lasting from the beginning of spring to the end of autumn, that is, the entire growing season (in exceptional cases at the turn of 1090 and 1091 also outside this season). Thus, during these two periods, Alexios Komnenos indeed had the aforementioned "window of opportunity," when, in theory, he could have arranged an expedition to re-take the Byzantine territories in Asia Minor well before 1095. The time span between December 1083 and the beginning of June 1087 seems particularly appropriate for this purpose, as it lasted more than three and a half years, and in that time quite a lot of success could have been achieved. However, this first impression needs to be somewhat corrected. Alexios Komnenos remained in Constantinople, but the war against the Normans lasted until July 1085. Until this conflict was over, Alexios Komnenos could not withdraw his most battle-worthy units from the Balkans and transfer them to Asia Minor, as this could cause disaster in the event of a sudden adverse turn in Epirus. Thus, the aforementioned first "opportunity window" needs to be reduced to a much shorter period between July 1085 and June 1087. But even the conclusion of the war against the Normans did not sufficiently improve the strategic situation in the Balkans for Alexios Komnenos to plan a larger-scale military action in Asia Minor, as Pecheneg inroads started to harass the Balkan provinces from 1085. In 1086, Alexios Komnenos had to send the most battle-worthy units against them, which presumably had been regenerated to some degree after the losses suffered during the war against the Normans. At the same time, the emperor devoted his time to the reconstruction of the Byzantine navy. Therefore, it follows that, even for the rest of the first time "slot," the opportunity to move east against the Seljuks was not a

<sup>1</sup>All the dates mentioned are contained in the previous text, where associated chronological issues and their solutions are explained in the relevant places.

real one. Alexios Komnenos was understandably trying to maintain the *status quo* in his relations with individual Seljuk rulers during this period and, through diplomacy or limited military resources which he had at his disposal in Asia Minor, to maintain the Byzantine presence there. It should also be remembered that sultan Süleyman ibn Kutlumuş was formally a Byzantine ally until his death in 1085 or 1086 and Alexios Komnenos could therefore at least theoretically count on his support.<sup>2</sup> Only after his death did more serious problems with Süleyman's former governors begin, in particular with emir Abu'l-Kasim of Nikaia and emir Çaka of Smyrna, leading to a definitive disruption of relatively peaceful coexistence with the Seljuk Turks and the resumption of their attacks against the Byzantine territories.

Similarly, the second "opportunity window" lasting from May 1091 to approximately June 1093 could not, on closer inspection, represent an ideal opportunity for greater offensive operations in the east. It is true that it was during this period that the emirs Çaka and Abu'l-Kasim, as well as the Seljuk sultan Malik-shah, died or were eliminated respectively. However, Alexios Komnenos just managed to conclude the devastating conflict with the Pechenegs at the cost of great efforts and a large number of casualties and because of his alliance with the Kumans. After a decade of constant warfare, he urgently needed a period of peace to finally begin to focus more on the civic administration of the Byzantine state. The most pressing area urging for a rapid and systematic reconstruction was the field of state finances, which could no longer be ignored. Also, Alexios Komnenos, the glorious victor over the Pechenegs, decided it was the most opportune moment to resolve an important question of imperial succession. Moreover, the army was not quite ready for another major offensive action, as it had suffered significant losses during the war against the Pechenegs and needed some time to reorganize and replenish losses. In the end, only the Byzantine navy operating in the northern Aegean against Çaka was active in this period.

On the basis of these arguments, it can be concluded that the accusations of some researchers presented at the beginning of this monograph, claiming that Alexios Komnenos could have initiated the reconquest of territories in Asia Minor long before 1095, or even that, for certain tactical reasons, he knowingly ignored these possibilities, have no realistic basis.

<sup>2</sup>Frankopan, *Crusade*, 52.

Alexios Komnenos, or any other Byzantine general in his place (if the situation in 1081 had evolved differently and, for example, his main rival Nikeforos Melissenos had come to the throne), would not have been able to start offensive actions under the circumstances described above until the victory over the Kumans, that is, until the summer of 1095.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this could have been the case had he been able to defeat all the enemies jeopardizing Byzantine territories in the Balkans much more efficiently and much sooner than Alexios Komnenos, but, as shown above, there was probably no such general to match Alexios Komnenos' military talent and level of military art in the Byzantine Empire in 1081. There were some military leaders, though, who almost outperformed him, for example Nikeforos Bryennios the Elder, who, however, was blinded in 1078 as a failed insurgent against the emperor Nikeforos III Botaneiates, which, according to the Byzantine tradition, prevented him from wearing the imperial diadem. It also effectively excluded him from important senior command posts, and he could only serve as a military adviser. Another very capable general was the loyal and resourceful Georgios Palaiologos, but he did not have a high enough social standing in 1081 to become the undisputed candidate for the emperor recognized by the majority of the Byzantine ruling class. Alexios Komnenos proved to be the only viable candidate at that critical moment, because in his person he combined all the required characteristics, skills, and abilities.

Marek Meško, Brno 2022

<sup>3</sup>It must be noted that Shepard came to a similar conclusion, although he did not elaborate on his argument in the same detail as I have tried to in this monograph. See Shepard, "Substance," 92.

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